THE FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE OF CORPORATE ALLIANCES

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ABSTRACT: *Metaphor is central to language. The present paper examines the widespread use of metaphor in the business press through the analysis of the metaphorical expressions describing corporate alliances in* Financial Times *and* El País. *Such expressions draw on information from the domains of WAR, FICTION, SPORT, GAME and LOVE and are instantiations of conceptual metaphors which result from processes of correspondence and blending and are explained following Lakoff's conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff 1980, 1987, 1996), and Fauconnier and Turner's blending approach (1995, 2006).*

The comparative analysis of the business metaphors in English and Spanish shows many similarities in the conceptualization of corporate alliances.

KEYWORDS*: Conceptual metaphor, domain, mapping, mental space, blending.*

EL LENGUAJE FIGURADO DE LAS ALIANZAS EMPRESARIALES

RESUMEN: *La metáfora desempeña un papel fundamental en la lengua. Este artículo analiza el uso extendido de la metáfora en la prensa económica a través de las expresiones metafóricas que describen las alianzas entre empresas en* Financial Times *y* El País. *Estas expresiones pertenecen a los dominios de la GUERRA, la FICCIÓN, el DEPORTE, el Juego y el AMOR, y son realizaciones de metáforas conceptuales generadas por procesos de correspondencia e integración conceptual y analizadas siguiendo las teorías de la metáfora de Lakoff (Lakoff 1980, 1987, 1996), y de Fauconnier y Turner (1995, 2006).*

El estudio comparativo de las metáforas económicas en inglés y español revela numerosas semejanzas en la conceptualización de las alianzas entre empresas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Metáfora conceptual, dominio, transferencia conceptual, espacio mental, integración conceptual.*

1. Introduction

Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life and language. The significant role of metaphor in language and thought is one of the postulates of cognitive linguistics (Lakoff 1980, 1987, 2006; Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff & Turner 1989; Kövecses 1995). These authors have shown that metaphor is not restricted to poetic style, but is heavily involved in everyday language. A well-known conceptual metaphor proposed by Lakoff (1987) is TIME IS MONEY, which has multiple instantiations:

(1) You're *wasting* lot of time.

(2) It is a time-*saving* procedure.

(3) He *spends* his time watching television.

In this paper we explore the metaphorical character of business language through the analysis of linguistic metaphors in the English and Spanish press. The basis for this study is a bilingual corpus comprising newspaper articles on corporate alliances published in *Financial Times* and *El País* in the last two years. The study shows that a) corporate alliances are frequently metaphorically structured in English and Spanish, and b) that the metaphorical conceptualization is similar in both languages, which gives proof that many metaphors tend to become conventionalized across languages.

We undertake this study from a cognitive linguistics perspective: Lakoff's conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff 1980, 1987, 2006) and Fauconnier and Turner's blending theory (Fauconnier 1995, 1997; Fauconnier and Turner 1995, 2006; Turner 1996). The discussion of the metaphors yields many correspondences in both languages, which argues for the universality of many metaphors.

2. Theoretical background

As pointed out earlier, Lakoff's conceptual metaphor theory provides the framework for the analysis of the metaphorical representation of corporate alliances in the press.

Lakoff's theory of metaphor can be summarized as follows:

1. Metaphor is conceptual, not linguistic, in nature.
2. Metaphor involves understanding a domain of experience (the target domain) in terms of a more concrete domain (the source domain). As Lakoff remarks,

"metaphor is a way of understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (1980: 5). The source domain is the domain supporting the literal meaning of the expression, whereas the target domain is the domain the expression is actually about (Croft & Cruse 2004: 195).

3. Much of our conceptual system is metaphorical.

4. Metaphor is a cross-domain mapping. A mapping is a fixed set of conceptual correspondences between a source domain and a target domain. Lakoff (2006) describes the relationship between both domains as a *function* where specific features of the source are mapped onto (transferred to) the target domain. The mapping is asymmetric (i.e. the conceptual structure is projected in the target domain, not the source domain) and partial.

5. Metaphorical language is a surface manifestation of conceptual metaphor. The term *metaphorical expression* refers to a linguistic expression (a word, phrase, or sentence) that is the surface realization of the cross-domain mapping (Lakoff 2006: 186).

6. Metaphor is conventional and part of the ordinary system of language and thought.

In the next section we discuss the use of metaphor in the Spanish and English economic discourse on corporate alliances.

3. Metaphorical conceptualization of corporate alliances in the Spanish and British press

The present study identifies and explains the linguistic and conceptual metaphors used in the description of corporate alliances in the Spanish and British press. The term *corporate alliances* refers primarily to takeovers and mergers. In a takeover (*compra* o *adquisición* in Spanish) a company gets control of another company by buying over fifty per cent of its shares, whereas in a merger two or more companies join together to form a larger one.

The analysis is based on a corpus of metaphors which have provided empirical support for our hypothesis about the high frequency of metaphor in the language of corporate alliances. The corpus consists of 91 metaphors retrieved from articles published in two widely read newspapers, *El País* and *Financial Times*, in 2009 and 2010. From this small sample it is apparent that metaphor is significant in the discourse on corporate alliances and that the following metaphors predominate:

TAKEOVERS AND MERGERS ARE

– WARS

– SPORT GAMES

– SERIALS/PLAYS

– CARD GAMES

– MARRIAGES

Corporate alliances are represented through a narrow range of domains: WAR, SPORTS, FICTION, GAME and LOVE. Table 1 illustrates the domains and the conceptual metaphors by means of a few examples:

SOURCE DOMAIN	CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR	METAPHORICAL EXPRESSION
WAR	TAKEOVERS AND MERGERS ARE WARS	Takeover battle as EcoSecurities rejects two bids. *Enel, que protagonizó con Acciona la ofensiva contra la OPA de la alemana E.ON sobre Endesa, pasará a controlar el 92% de la eléctrica.*
SPORT	TAKEOVERS AND MERGERS ARE A SPORT GAME	Carlyle joins Gas Natural asset race. *Sobre Hansenet Julio Linares precisó que están en la recta final para cerrar el acuerdo con Telecom Italia.*
FICTION	TAKEOVERS AND MERGERS ARE SERIALS TAKEOVERS AND MERGERS ARE PLAYS	In spite of the low-rent "Dynasty" plot so far the company has been doing well. C&W sets scene but is reticent on detail.
GAME	TAKEOVERS AND MERGERS ARE CARD GAMES	Branson holds the cards in Northern Rock game.
LOVE	TAKEOVERS AND MERGERS ARE MARRIAGES	Enel ponders how to grab its runaway bride. *Con el divorcio pactado, Acciona y Enel tienen razones para sentirse aliviados.*

Table 1. *Metaphorical structuring of corporate alliances.*

The quantitative findings of our corpus-based research are shown in table 2:

Source domain	Spanish instantiations	English instantiations	Total percentage
WAR	22	23	49,5%
SPORT	2	4	6,6%
FICTION	2	11	14,2%
GAME		6	6,6%
LOVE	9	12	23,1%

Table 2. *Proportion of metaphors from different domains in the corpus*.

We have found a rich repertoire of metaphorical expressions, particularly from the war and love domains, as table 3 shows. (The number in brackets indicates the tokens, i.e. the number of times the linguistic metaphor occurs).

Source domain	Spanish metaphorical expressions	English metaphorical expressions
WAR	*batalla* (3), *guerra* (3), *lucha* (2), *estrategia* (2), *alianza* (2), *derrotar* (2), *vencer, asaltar, pugna, ofensiva, tregua, negociaciones, resistencia numantina*.	battle (5), fight (2), victory (2), war, hostilities, fightback, struggling, strategy, establish a commanding position, alliance, allies, defences, defend itself, truce, defeat, comrades in arms, heroes.
SPORT	*jugadores, recta final*.	race, beat, play a slow defence, The ball is in X's court.
FICTION	*desenlace, entre bambalinas*.	suspense (3), set the scene (2), saga, quit the stage, plot, soap opera, long-running drama, leading characters.
GAME		stakes, high-stakes poker, hold the cards show one's cards, play game of poker play by the rules.
LOVE	*relación, noviazgo, novia, boda casarse, matrimonio* (2), *convivencia divorcio*.	suitors (2), woo (2), marriage (2), bride (2), good fit, matchmakers, wedding season, make it to the altar.

Table 3. *Metaphorical expressions in the corpus*.

The corpus places more emphasis on the war metaphor (45 instantiations, i.e. nearly half of the corpus). Some metaphorical patterns are recurrent in both samples: *lucha, pugna*/fight, *batalla*/battle, while others are limited to one corpus, e.g. *resistencia numantina*, comrades in arms.

Another conspicuous metaphor in the corpus is TAKEOVERS AND MERGERS ARE MARRIAGES. This metaphor is consistently developed in both samples. Consider the following extracts:

(4) *"Nos interesa el largo plazo y como en un noviazgo hay que aprender a conocerse antes de casarse y pensamos que hay tiempo", señala. "Estamos abiertos al diálogo con todas las partes involucradas, escuchamos y proponemos, pero llevamos apenas un año de noviazgo", refiere. Pero qué pasa si la* novia *no quiere casarse. "La pregunta que nos hacemos es por qué Agval quiere prescindir de lo que podemos aportar", alega. Pese a ello, Achard mantiene que el diálogo con Agval se está produciendo y está convencido de que "esta boda se celebrará".*

The extract deals with a French company's (Suez Environnment) wish to become the partner of a Spanish company, Aguas de Valencia (Agval). The Managing Director describes the relationship with the Spanish firm in terms of an engagement (*noviazgo*) which he hopes will eventually lead to marriage, despite Agval's refusal.

The English corpus provides similar examples, such as the following:

(5) There has been takeover activity, but mainly by offshore entities buying into Lloyd's. But while the matchmakers have been busy, most Lloyd's sector marriages have so far failed to make it to the altar.

We detected some metaphorical preferences in the corpus. Metaphors based on the domain of game were only found in the English sample. The proportion of fiction metaphors differs significantly across the two languages (two in Spanish, eleven in English). The higher number of English metaphorical patterns gives evidence of its greater salience. Sport metaphors are limited in range in both corpora.

All these conceptual metaphors are realizations of the superordinate metaphor COMPANIES ARE PEOPLE (Barcelona 2000: 6) and can be subsumed under three sets:

1. COMPETITION-based metaphors

Competition is a crucial element in the domains of WAR, SPORT and GAME. Indeed wars, sports and games are all forms of competition. The difference between these activities lies in that sports and games are institutionalized forms of competition. Moreover, competition is most aggressive in the war scenario.

Competition is closely connected with another element: the purpose of winning. This links the source domains of WAR, SPORTS and GAME with the target domain of BUSINESS, since the major objective of a corporate alliance is to gain control of a company or a sector. This goal reinforces intercompany competition.

Further, the domains of SPORT and WAR share a number of features (Charteris-Black, 2004: 125-126):

(a) Both domains involve control of territory in which gains and losses can be measured.

(b) Success in both requires attributes of physical and mental strength as well as team spirit.

(c) They are both rule-based activities.

(d) They both require extensive physical and mental training.

(e) They both require the use of technology to assist in reviewing outcomes and establishing whether or not these were normally justified.

(f) They are both considered highly newsworthy if gauged by their extensive coverage and commentary in the media.

The common features of the domains of WAR, SPORT and GAME give coherence to the metaphoric configuration of corporate alliances.

2. FICTION-based metaphors

Fiction metaphors describe takeovers and mergers as lengthy and intricate processes with a suspense element. This point is illustrated by means of the following examples:

(6) ITV's long-running drama.

(7) Court set to end suspense over GdF-Suez deal.

(8) Gaz de France is hoping finally to end the long-running suspense surrounding its proposed merger with private French utility Suez.

(9) Nestlé likely to end suspense over its l'Oréal stake.

3. LOVE metaphor

Another frequent view of takeovers and mergers yielded by Spanish and English corpus data presents them as a marriage. This metaphor assigns gender roles to the companies involved in the takeover. Herrera and White (2000), and Koller (2008), among others, have pinpointed the way gender roles metaphorically underlie the discourse of corporate alliance. The company being controlled is female, while the bidders companies are portrayed as males, as the following examples show:

(10) Sweet taste of Cadbury draws suitors.

(11) Second suitor tries to woo TDC.

(12) Kraft has 60 days to woo Cadbury's shareholders after it posts its offer document in late November or early December.

(13) *Tras 17 tormentosos meses de relación, Acciona ha acordado vender al grupo italiano el 25% del capital de Endesa.*

(14) *EnBW optó en diciembre de 2001 por pactar el gobierno compartido de HC con el tándem formado por Cajastur y la portuguesa EDP. La convivencia apenas duró dos años y medio.*

(15) *Una pizca de desamor y mucha suspicacia sobre posibles problemas en la dote florecen en vísperas del matrimonio pretendido, y anunciado el 19 de diciembre, de Ferrovial con su filial de autopistas Cintra.*

(16) *Berlusconi ha aceptado el proyecto de matrimonio entre Telecom y Telefónica.*

As pointed out earlier, corpus data corroborate Koller's (2008: 104) claim that the war metaphor is firmly entrenched in business discourse. The centrality of the war frame in the press coverage of corporate alliances is illustrated by the wealth of metaphorical mappings between the source domain of WAR and the target domain of BUSINESS and by the range of instantiations of this conceptual metaphor (cf. table 3). By way of illustration, consider the following examples:

(17) Goldshield bid battle hots up.

The fight for the saturated Nordic telecommunications market is like the epic struggle of an Old Norse saga. Heroes are pursuing mobile and broadband acquisitions and overseas expansion to break free of the trolls of price-cutting and low growth.

Companies re-examine takeover defences.

En 2007, en el fragor de la batalla por Endesa, el grupo aceptó que la eléctrica fuera gestionada por los españoles.

La guerra entre Iberdrola y ACS se traslada al Congreso.

(18) *El silencio de Vivendi se entiende ahora como una mera estrategia mientras maniobraba entre bambalinas con los actuales dueños de la compañía para asaltar la mayoría del capital en lugar de enzarzarse en una guerra abierta de OPA con Telefónica.*

La operación es el perfecto reflejo de la senda estratégica que ha decidido tomar La Caixa: por una parte, replegarse en las participaciones de carácter industrial, sin abandonarlas; por la otra, reforzar la pata financiera y aseguradora de Criteria.

Cadbury no ha recibido noticia alguna sobre esta presunta alianza entre los dos gigantes.

Mapfre ha sellado una alianza estratégica en Banco do Brasil.

(19) The chipmaker Broadcom has admitted defeat in its attempt to acquire Emulex, its smaller rival.

The joint venture deal marked a strategic victory for the French over its main European rivals.

Boeing set to beat Airbus.

Vivendi derrota a Telefónica en la lucha por la brasileña GVT.

Sacyr da una tregua a Brufau en Repsol.

[…] después de que el grupo francés Vivendi derrotara la OPA lanzada por Telefónica.

Examples in (17) yield a vision of corporate alliances as bitter battles in which the rival companies show a hostile attitude, attacking the others' positions and defending their own.

Like armies, the companies plan and use strategies to win (18).

Examples in (19) illustrate the correspondences between a war and a corporate alliance concerning the action development, the outcome being truce, surrender, victory or defeat.

In order to capture the whole system of correspondences between the source domain of WAR and the target domain of BUSINESS, we follow a blending approach (Fauconnier 1995, 1997; Fauconnier and Turner 1995, 2006; Turner 1996). Blending theory hinges upon the notion of a "mental space". In Fauconnier' and Turner's view, mental spaces are "small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action" (2006: 307). They are structured by frames that specify the nature of the relevant activities, events and participants.

In this model metaphor results from a blending process whereby structure from two or more input spaces is projected to a third space, the blend. The projection is selective. A fourth mental space, the generic space, represents that structure which is common to the input spaces. There is a cross-space mapping of counterpart connections between the input spaces, which makes the projection possible.

The figures below illustrate the way the blend is created as a result of the projection. The mental spaces are represented by circles, elements by points in the circles, and connections between elements in different spaces by lines.
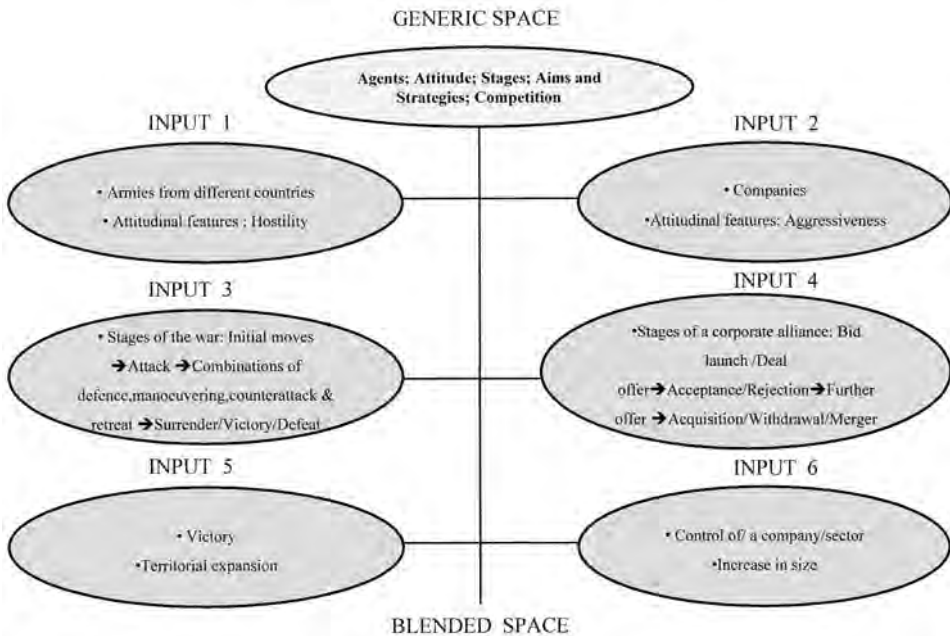
Figure 1 illustrates the WAR and BUSINESS blend.

Figure 1. *WAR and BUSINESS blend*.

While inputs 3 and 4 sketch the action sequence in war and business scenarios, inputs 5 and 6 contain information about the effects of winning a military or business battle: territorial or commercial expansion.

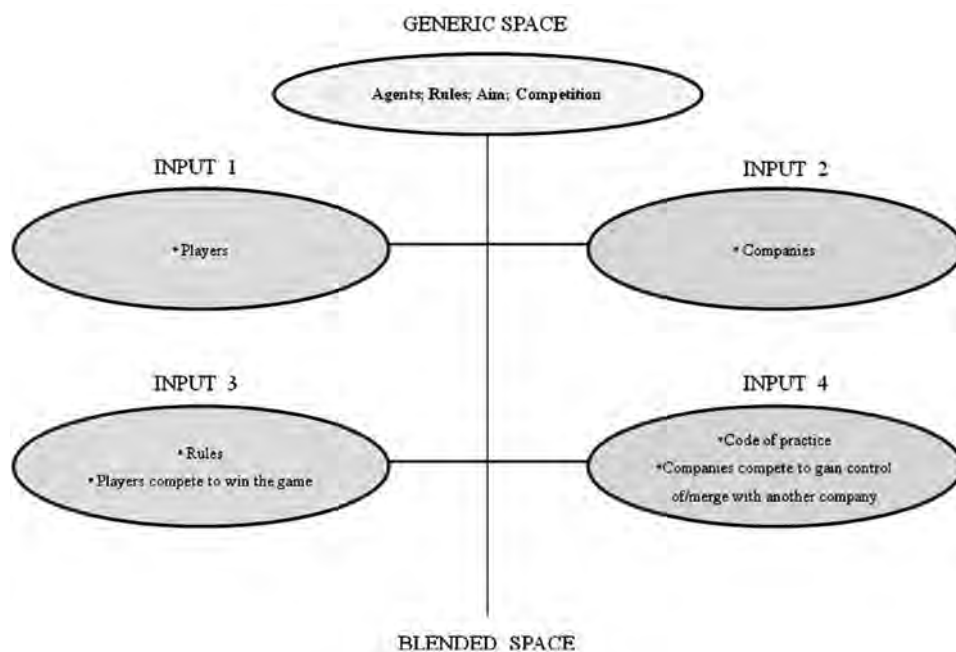The GAME and BUSINESS blend is outlined in figure 2.

Figure 2. *GAME and BUSINESS blend*.

Inputs 1 and 2 present players and their counterpart, the rival companies, as opponents, as shown in the following example:

(20) *El mercado argentino de telecomunicaciones tiene dos grandes jugadores: Telefónica de Argentina y Telecom Argentina*.

(21) EDF and British Energy play game of nuclear poker.

Inputs 3 and 4 bring to focus two key features in the game and business frames: fair play and the purpose of winning. The following examples illustrate this point:

(22) The stakes are high and neither EDF nor British Energy is blinking. But someone will eventually have to show their cards if Britain's nuclear future is not to be compromised.

(23) The ball is in Resolution's court to make a further offer. The big concern for Resolution could be that Friends is playing a slow defence in order to draw out another, better offer from elsewhere, or to get past the upcoming reporting season and then look to its rivals for a deal.

4. Conclusion

The present paper has demonstrated that much of business language is metaphorical and that metaphor is a phenomenon across languages. The research into the figurative language employed to describe corporate alliances in the British and Spanish press has revealed the rich metaphorical conceptualization of business. A range of conceptual metaphors dominate the press conceptualization of takeovers and mergers: BUSINESS IS WAR, BUSINESS IS A SPORT GAME, BUSINESS IS A SERIAL/PLAY, BUSINESS IS A CARD GAME, and BUSINESS IS A ROMANCE.

Further, our analysis points to a similar metaphorical understanding of economic phenomena in English and Spanish, which gives evidence of the universality of many metaphors.

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