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Conclusion: Gender-neutral Metaphors

THE OPTIMIST: But are you able to establish a graspable relation between language and war? THE GRUMBLER: This one, for instance: that the language most petrified as phrase and inventory shows the tendency and the willingness to regard, in a voice of conviction, impeccable in itself everything seen as reproachable in others . . . THE OPTIMIST: Yes, language is a terrible burden . . . THE GRUMBLER: It gets more vacant when metaphor is responsible at the material level . . . When the success in our current positions was sure as a gun and the bombardment of a place a bombshell. THE OPTIMIST: Yes, all these sayings originate from the martial sphere and now we are just living in it. (Kraus, 1926/1964, vol. 1, pp. 152 and 196)

In the introduction to this book, it was proposed that business media discourse is characterized by coherent conceptual models centering on a WAR metaphor. Such models were regarded as a masculinizing force on both that discourse as well as on related social practices. The hypothesis was tested using a theoretical framework integrating critical and cognitive approaches to language and discourse. The analysis of two central areas covered by the business media – marketing and M&A – shows that these discourses are in fact permeated by central conceptual models. These models are, first and foremost, characterized by various forms of dynamic movement in relation to, and aggression against, other entities in a bounded space. Although they may vary in their degree of hybridity, they are nevertheless coherent. In both discourses, the WAR/FIGHTING metaphor proves to be the most frequent, most varied and ultimately most entrenched. In addition, it also turned out that it is supported by the other metaphors in the cluster, even if these seem contradictory at first (as in the case of the MATING metaphor in the M&A
cluster). Obviously, such cognitive support must necessarily be rather subtle, rendering the favoured conceptual model all the more persuasive. In this context, it also showed that alternative metaphors are at best marginal and at worst negligible. What is more, they also tend to be co-opted into the dominant cluster, leaving little leeway for counter-discursive conceptualizations.

So the two discourses in question are determined by coherent, albeit more or less heterogeneous, metaphor clusters. The WAR/FIGHTING metaphor is most prominent in those clusters, translating into conceptual models characterized by aggressive competition. Despite the fact that the conceptual models discussed in sections 4.3 and 5.3 require additional empirical proof along the lines of cognitive psychological experiments, a critical approach should still discuss their impact on texts, discourse, cognition and, ultimately, a broader socio-economic framework: as war – and its more general [+ANIMATE] counterpart, fighting – is highly masculinized, its quantitative and qualitative dominance as a metaphor in any discourse makes that discourse a site of male-defined mental models. Perpinan’s (1990, p. 2) observation that ‘almost everything in daily life [has its] own brand of militarized masculinity with a . . . language to go with it’ holds true in the case of business media discourse, too. This enforced use of aggressive and competitive conceptual models can be regarded as part of a backlash against women moving inexorably into worksites previously occupied by men, [so that] paid work within the ‘new’ capitalist system of production retains values closely associated with dominant discourses of masculinity . . . locating women and notions of femininity as the ‘Other’. (Whitehead, 2003, p. 126)

Indeed, the models suggest strongly that masculine ‘attributes [such as aggressive, independent, unemotional, competitive, logical, adventurous, self-confident, ambitious] remain highly regarded in business organizations, global corporations, the armed forces, most public sector sites and professional sport’ (ibid., p. 127). Excluding women by reifying business as a male arena is just one of the reasons why a change in metaphor seems highly desirable. After all, ‘what sustains men in management is not just numerical advantage, but . . . the competitive, aggressive culture that speaks of masculine . . . values’ (ibid., p. 131). As noted in the introduction, socio-economic realities not only determine metaphor but also ‘selective use of metaphor may help create [a] reality which is unequal and . . . the metaphorical