

COMMERCE METAPHOR IN THE EU UNIVERSITIES' MISSION STATEMENTS: A CRITICAL SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Metaphor analysis today is valued for its implied ideological meaning. The communicative function of metaphors can be discerned through the analysis of systematically organized metaphorical expressions in the text, by thus identifying of the activated conceptual frames and deconstructing implied ideology. By using the analytical framework of Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) and procedurally employing Pragglejaz Group's MIP, this study aims at evaluating metaphor use in the mission statements of the first twenty European Universities, according to the Webometrics ranking. It has been determined that the most frequently realised metaphor underlying the selected texts is that of HIGHER EDUCATION IS A COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY. It has been determined that the COMMERCE metaphor plays a significant role in positive self-representation of a higher institution. The communicative function of this metaphor is to communicate 'corporate identity' by popularising a more transactional approach to relationship, competitiveness for superiority, and the importance of individual self-interest.

Key words: European universities; mission statements; critical metaphor analysis; ideology.

Metaphor, therefore, defines the pattern of perception to which people respond ... Each metaphor intensifies selected perceptions and ignores others, thereby helping others one to concentrate on desired consequences of favoured public policies and helping one to ignore their unwanted, unthinkable, or irrelevant premises and aftermaths. Each metaphor can be a subtle way of highlighting what one wants to believe and avoiding what one does not wish to face.
(Edelman, 1971: p. 68)

1. Introduction

Metaphor analysis today is valued for its implied ideological meaning. The communicative function of metaphors can be discerned through the analysis of systematically organized metaphorical expressions in the text, by thus identifying of the activated conceptual frames and restoring moral matrix or hidden ideology (see Charteris-Black, 2004, 2009, 2011; Goatly, 2007; Johnson, 1993; Musolff, 2006; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999; Lakoff, 1996, 2004, 2006; Turner, 2001). In that respect, metaphors are viewed as both cognitive filters and containers of human experience reflecting people's worldviews. Based on these assumptions, the purpose of this study is to

metaphorically analyse and evaluate the narrative of the mission statements of twenty top European Universities and determine the implied ideological value of the most frequently and systematically realised metaphor(s). To achieve that, the following research questions are raised:

- (1) What kind of metaphorical expressions can be identified as prevalent in the selected narrative?
- (2) What does metaphor use suggest about the positive representation of higher education in the selected texts?

Before providing answers to the raised questions, in sections (2, 3 and 4), in Section 2, the key concepts of discourse, metaphor and ideology will be defined. In Section 3, the previous research in educational metaphors will be overviewed. In Section 4, the genre of a mission statement will be discussed and the research hypothesis raised. In the following sections (5) and (6), the research findings will be presented and discussed. In the closing section, some concluding remarks will be drawn.

2. The concepts of discourse, metaphor and ideology

In the current approaches to metaphor analysis, metaphor is viewed inseparably from discourse and implied ideological meaning (Goatly 1997, 2007; Koller 2004, 2009; Lakoff 1996, 2004, 2011; Chilton 2004; Chilton and Schäffner, 2011; Charteris-Black, 2011 etc). From a discourse analysis perspective, the understanding of metaphors in discourse is treated as the beginning of a new debate about their implied meaning, and how metaphors can impact further social activities (Zinken and Musolff, 2009). Recent research has shown that different understandings of metaphors depend on the narratives these metaphors are embedded in (Hart, 2011; Hellsten, 2002; Musolff, 2004; Nerlich and Koteyko, 2009; Koller, 2008, 2009). In this aspect, metaphor can be viewed as an inseparable part of any discourse activity.

Discourse, at this point, is treated as an interactive narrative constructing social identities and ideologies (Van Dijk, 2010). This more recent perception of discourse fits well into and complements the generally accepted notion of discourse as a social practice ordering power relations in a society as initially proposed by Fairclough (2001, 2003). In this paper taking discourse as both a social practice and a collective narrative, the interaction of metaphor and implied ideological meaning is viewed as an interplay of micro and macro discourse mechanisms. Each of them can be defined and illustrated in a greater detail as follows.

Cognitive linguists perceive metaphor as a reflection of general conceptual organization, categorization principles and processing mechanisms (see Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999; Gibbs, 1999; Grady, 1999; Kövecses 2009, 2010; Mey, 2006). In this view, metaphor is seen as a specific mental mapping and a neural co-activation influencing the way people think, reason and imagine in their everyday life (Johnson, 1993; Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). More importantly, as noted by Lakoff (2004, p. 13), metaphorical thought is used constantly, and people ‘act on these metaphors’. Metaphors may vary from person to person, thus not all forms of reasoning are universal (ibid., 13-16). The micro level of metaphors can be discerned by identifying and analysing linguistic metaphorical expressions deconstructing them into conceptual metaphors of A IS B form (more on that see Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010; Croft and Cruse, 2004; Taylor, 2002). The analysis of metaphors, in its turn, leads to different observations about views or ideologies related to the so-called macro-level of discursive narrative.

By ideology here is meant what Van Dijk (2011, p. 384) refers to as “a form of socially shared and distributed cognition or a system of socially shared beliefs” that may control many kinds of social practices. It is furthermore assumed that metaphor, as both a mental model and a discourse structure, can be explored for its ideological implications or non-linguistic realizations (see Kövecses, 2010; Goatly, 2002; 2007; Velasco-Sacristan, 2010). According to Goatly, most of metaphorical models “have ideological implications, in the sense that they are recruited and used by those exerting economic, scientific, political or personal power” (2007, p. 35). There are numerous instances of conventional metaphors subconsciously creating, reinforcing or enacting ideology without our being aware of it.

3. Metaphor in educational discourse

The relevance of metaphor in education was discussed by Taylor (1987) and Jensen (2006). Taylor (1987) viewed metaphors as an obligatory means of raising awareness about perceptions underlying educational discourse. While for Jensen (2006: 14), “metaphor assumes a central position in educational theory and practice. It is not a mere linguistic device for adding colour to dialogue. It is a salient feature of our thinking and our discourse about education”. More recently, Cameron’s research (2003) of metaphor in school education has also demonstrated how metaphor is employed by teachers not only in explaining more complex ideas but also in mediating class activities.

Within the context of higher education, Browne, Hiers, and Quinn (1995) also recognized the effect of metaphor, in particular the FACTORY and CONSUMER metaphors. Both metaphors are interrelated in the sense that their implied meaning construes a reality of an educational philosophy based on the distinction between needs and desire. Ideologically these metaphors are more negative than positive, as argued by Browne and his colleagues (1995), the immediate wants associated with the CONSUMER and FACTORY metaphors fail in an education system based on long-term benefits. Batstone (2000) argues that the report of university strategic planning, namely the University of Manitoba, can be framed by conflicting metaphors, such as UNIVERSITY AS COMMUNITY and UNIVERSITY AS BUSINESS. Differently from the previous research, this study addresses the indirect kind of higher educational discourse. It is aimed to analyse what is characteristic of metaphor use in the text where higher education is directly popularised. The aspect of popularisation is determined by the genre of the selected text – mission statement.

4. Missions statements as a genre

Mission statement is known as a specific genre of corporate discourse. Hence, it has been extensively analysed in management research.

Williams (2008) concentrated on their strategic nature for creating a strong corporate ethos and the relationship between the effectiveness of mission statements and successful financial performance. From a discursive perspective, by adopting the ethos-pathos model, Isaksson (2005) identified and analysed the linguistic realizations of virtues and emotions in mission statements. Koller (2008, 2009) adopted a cognitive critical discourse analysis to study the relationship between metaphor use and corporate identity in mission statements. It has been noted that the purpose of mission statements in business and management discourse is to communicate executives' ideas of corporate identities (Koller, 2008; 2009). Sun and Jiang (2013, pp. 6-7) compared metaphor use in the mission statements of Chinese and US companies, noting that Chinese corporations are described as “energetic leaders” and “strong competitors” thus are more competition-oriented; by contrast, US companies tend to project themselves as “ethical and responsible community members” thus are projecting themselves as more cooperation-oriented.

As based on that, it can be presumed that mission statements as a genre of corporate discourse when applied to higher education will preserve one of its major

features—communicating ‘corporate identity’. To clarify, this study will attempt at testing the hypothesis of how relevant the purpose of communicating ‘corporate identity’ can be for higher educational discourse. Thus, it is expected that mission statements in higher education will also communicate ideas about social identities and roles that are important for successful ‘management’. Motivated by the socio-cognitive factors of metaphor research, this study adopts the framework of cognitive socio-linguistics to investigate metaphor use in the mission statements of EU Universities.

5. A critical socio-linguistic analysis: data and methodology

To achieve the above mentioned, the data of the mission statements was collected from the online sources of the first twenty European Universities (in the time span of June to August, 2014), according to the Webometrics ranking as provided by the Cybermetrics Lab (Spanish National Research Council, CSIC). The Ranking Web or Webometrics is the largest academic ranking of Higher Education Institutions, which is performed by the Cybermetrics Lab for the providing “reliable, multidimensional, updated, and useful information about the performance of universities from all over the world based on their web presence and impact” (see Webometrics.info). This ranking system is based on the composite indicator that takes into account both the volume of the Web contents and the visibility and impact of these web publications according to the number of external inlinks they received (Webometrics.info).

Pragglejaz group’s MIP (Pragglejaz Group, 2007) was employed as a research tool of identifying metaphoric expressions or recognizing linguistic metaphors in the selected texts. The main principle of the procedure is to analyse the contextual and basic meanings of the selected expressions. The basic meaning refers here to the meaning of a lexical unit which tends to be more either (1) more concrete, or (2) related to bodily action, or (3) more precise (as opposed to vague), or (4) historically older (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). In addition, it is expected that basic meanings are not necessarily the most frequent meanings of the lexical unit (*ibid.*, p. 3). In this study, the following dictionary sources were used to analyse the basic meaning of the lexical units: two online sources of OED (<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>) and thesaurus (www.dictionary.com), and one Oxford paperback reference—Concise Dictionary of English Etymology (1996). After the analysis of the basic meaning, it has to be decided whether basic and contextual meanings contrast but can be understood in comparison with each other (*ibid.*, p. 9). If yes, the selected expression has been marked as

metaphorical. For example, the QUALITY IS QUANTITY metaphor was frequently evoked in the research data, as in the statement below:

- (1) *The University staff is recognized and rewarded as its greatest **asset**.*
(Cambridge)

In this context, the noun “asset” is associated with the positive qualities attributed to people. By contrast, the basic meaning of the noun is related to quantity, namely a single item of ownership having exchange value or a useful thing. The contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning but can be understood in comparison to it: we can understand abstract quality as related to people in terms of physical quantity, value and use. The associations that are evoked by the concept of objects of value in the context of human relationship signify the following conceptual mapping: QUALITY (people’s value, i.e. *the University staff*) IS QUANTITY (i.e. *assets*). The social role of this metaphor is characterized by conservative ideology (see Lakoff, 2006; Goatly, 2007), when people or employees are perceived as resources, and whose lives are controlled by corporations.

Based on Charteris-Black’s three-stage model (2004, p. 39) of critical metaphor analysis—(1) metaphor identification, (2) metaphor interpretation and (3) metaphor explanation—the collected research data was interpreted and explained. After the first stage of identifying metaphors by procedurally employing Pragglejaz Group’s MIP, metaphors were deconstructed and their pragmatic factors interpreted. Thirdly, the retrieved conceptual metaphors were explained in terms of their social role in persuasion, as implied by their ideological meaning.

6. Results and discussion

6.1. Summary of research findings

The overall research data consists of 12 261 words and 595 metaphoric utterances. The data analysis has shown that University mission statements are a variety of higher education discourse whereby the aims, objectives and raised standards of an academic institution are defined and described. Due to the average density of metaphoric usages of the collected data (i.e. 1 metaphoric expression per approximately 29 words), the description is metaphorically loaded.

The analysis of metaphorical expressions indicates that the source domains of COMMERCE and COMPETITION are the most frequent and overlapping in the collected data. Table 1 presents an overview of the metaphor frequency and the identified source

domains (SD) in the collected sample. The metaphor frequency (F), relative to the total amount of language of the sample and multiplied by one hundred (i.e. $100 f / t$ in De Landtsheer, 1994, 2009), as well as the average density of one metaphorical expression (1 me) per number of words (Charteris-Black, 2010) are calculated.

Table 1. Metaphor frequency (F) and the prevalent source domains (SD)

R	Universities	F	1 me per words	SD
1	University of Oxford	0.42	1 x 23	Personification (10) Commerce (7) Competition (4) Structure (3) Journey (2) Nature (2)
2	University of Cambridge	0.89	1 x 11	Commerce (11) Personification (6) Competition (3) Journey (2)
3	University College London	0.61	1 x 16	Commerce (4) Personification (4) Quantity (3) Competition (4) Structure (4) Journey (2)
4	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich	0.52	1 x 20	Personification (9) Quantity / Up (4) Competition (4) Commerce (4) Journey (4) Structure (3) Nature (1)
5	University of Edinburgh	1.11	1 x 9	Competition (4) Commerce (3) Personification (3) Quantity / Up (3) Structure (2)
6	Utrecht University	0.50	1 x 20	Personification (7) Competition (4) Commerce (4) Quantity /Up (2)
7	University of Vienna	0.44	1 x 23	Personification (7) Quantity / Up (6) Competition (2) Commerce (2)
8	Ecole polytechnique	0.97	1 x 10	Commerce (15)

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	fédérale de Lausanne			Competition (10) Personification (8) Quantity / Up (4) Journey (3) Nature (2)
9	Heidelberg University	0.89	1 x 11	Personification (22) Quantity / Up (7) Competition (5) Commerce (5) Journey (3) Nature (3) Structure (2)
10	University of Amsterdam	0.77	1 x 13	Quantity / Up (7) Personification (5) Commerce (4)
11	The Complutense University of Madrid	0.47	1 x 10	Personification (7) Commerce (4) Competition (2)
12	Sapienza University of Rome	0.47	1 x 21	Quantity / Up (5) Commerce (5) Competition (4) Personification (3) Depersonification (2)
13	University of Copenhagen	0.31	1 x 32	Commerce (9) Quantity (8) Competition (4) Nature (2)
14	University of Helsinki EU	0.37	1 x 27	Competition (11) Commerce (8) Personification (6) Quantity / Up (4)
15	Lomonosov Moscow State University	0.29	1 x 35	Quantity / Up (32) Commerce (6) Competition (2) Personification (4) Depersonification (3)
16	The University of Porto	0.46	1 x 22	Personification (11) Commerce (9) Competition (3) Nature (1)
17	University of Oslo	0.29	1 x 35	Quantity / Up (10) Commerce (4) Personification (3) Competition (3)

18	Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich	0.43	1 x 23	Quantity / Up (7) Commerce (6) Competition (4) Personification (3)
19	University of Glasgow	0.33	1 per 28	Competition (17) Quantity / Up (16) Commerce (8) Personification (4)
20	The University of Bonn	0.47	1 per 21	Competition (11) Personification (5) Quantity / Up (3) Commerce (2)

Tracing the identified source domains from the top of this table to the bottom, one can see how the source domains of Personification, Quantity, Competition and Commerce come to overlap.

6.2. Discussion

Metaphor analysis has shown that the most frequently realised metaphor in the collected data is HIGHER EDUCATION IS A COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY. As a complex metaphor, its source domain is overlapping with two other metaphors: personification and competition.

In metaphor research, personification is viewed as a frequently used strategy for emotional appeal and may be explained by the GREAT CHAIN METAPHOR (Lakoff and Turner, 1989, p. 167).

This metaphor is based on the hierarchical conceptualisation of forms of being: HUMANS, ANIMALS, PLANTS, COMPLEX OBJECTS, and NATURAL PHYSICAL THINGS. The forms of “a lower status” within this conceptualisation are expected to be structured through those enjoying “a higher status”. Thus, the university, a form with a lower status, is expected to be categorized as an ideal person, a form with “a higher status”, endowed with the traits that are positively characterised in the narrative of higher education discourse. The UNIVERSITY IS A PERSON metaphor is linguistically realised in the fact that universities are often described with expressions of personal traits and referred to with the use of the possessive case and active performative verbs. For example:

- (2) *Oxford's remarkable global **appeal** continues to grow. (Oxford)*

- (3) *A **special status** of the University was ensured by the supreme authority of its Founder, Empress Elizaveta Petrovna (Lomonosov)*
- (4) *The University's core mission is to: **train** new generations of researchers, **produce** academics who have both specialist knowledge and professional skills, **conduct** groundbreaking research, **address** social issues and **work** towards solving them (Utrecht).*
- (5) *The University of Bonn **operates** internationally, **actively seeks** cooperation and **sets clear subject priorities**. (Bonn)*
- (6) *As a great civic university Edinburgh especially **values** its intellectual and economic relationship with the Scottish community.*
- (7) *The University of Copenhagen is a **member** of IARU (International Alliance of Research Universities).*
- (8) *Commitment, inspiration, ambition and independence are Utrecht University's core **values**.*
- (9) *Our University is **committed to** truth, fairness and respect. (Glasgow)*

Next, the positive personal traits, attributed to Universities mostly belong to the source domain of COMMERCE. Any of the top twenty EU universities is described as a person whose qualities are presented from a positive perspective, related to commercial activities. The metaphorical use of verbs, related to different acts of commercial activity and exchange and evoked by the complex metaphor of UNIVERSITY IS A PERSON OF COMMERCE, illustrates this:

- (10) *The UvA seeks **to offer** an inspiring international academic environment in which both staff and students can **develop** their talents **optimally**. (Amsterdam)*
- (11) *Our University is **focused on developing** excellence based on wide networks of quality groups, on **boosting** emerging groups, and on **incorporating** young researchers. (Madrid)*
- (12) *The University has **invested** around £650,000 in a range of three-year Fellowships covering a diverse and innovative array of interdisciplinary projects. (Glasgow)*

The use of the verb 'offer' in (10), or the verbs 'develop optimally', 'boost', and 'incorporate' in (11), or 'invest' in (12) are related to the conceptual domain of a commercial activity, whereby a beneficial exchange between a university and students

is implied. There are instances of clear references to the benefits of such an exchange, as in the following example below.

- (13) *We have also announced this year a major new initiative designed to ensure the most talented graduate students from all over the world can **benefit from what Oxford has to offer**. (Oxford)*

This gives evidence to the interrelatedness of personification and commerce. As in (13) above, the university is perceived as a person who offers, while students are those who gain benefits.

Another positive personal trait in the context of the COMMERCE metaphor is enacted through the concept of leadership, which is linguistically realized through different parts of speech, i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives. Compare how the concept of leadership is linguistically realized in (14), (15) and (16).

- (14) *ETH Zurich is one of the **leading** international universities for technology and the natural sciences.*
- (15) *As a world-**leading** centre of academic excellence we aim to: enhance our position as one of the world's **leading** research and teaching universities <...> (Edinburgh)*
- (16) *The University aims to **take the lead in implementing** the Bologna principles into its teaching programmes. (Utrecht)*

The basic meaning of the verb 'lead' and its derived forms referring to 'go first', 'be in advance', or 'surpass' (see Thesaurus.com) or 'show the way to by going with or ahead' (see Oxforddictionaries.com), is sustained in the modern use and evoked by the COMMERCE metaphor. Its use is complemented by the ideological frame of competitiveness, continuously emphasized as a constituent element of leadership. Competitiveness is thus presented as essential to becoming the best and most successful in the context of higher education. For instance:

- (17) ***Occupying a leading position** in Germany and in Europe, the University is committed to providing its **global competitiveness**. (Heidelberg)*
- (18) *Sapienza carries out **outstanding** scientific research in most disciplines, **achieving impressive results** both on a national and international level. (Sapienza)*

- (19) *Founded in 1640, the University of Helsinki wants to **strengthen its position among the world's leading multidisciplinary research universities** and to actively promote the well-being of humanity and a fair society. (Helsinki)*

As illustrated above, the social role of competition has moral implications. According to Lakoff's conservative worldview, in Western conceptualisation, competition is seen as a crucial and moral condition for 'the development and sustenance of the right kind of person' (1996, p. 69). The same moral matrix is extended to universities continuously competing for the status of the best.

The social role of the COMMERCE metaphor can be viewed as the extension of the social experience of the market economy, where demand and supply principles are followed, to the social experience of popularising higher education. This can be traced in the fact that most of the activities are viewed in terms of successful entrepreneurship. For example:

- (20) *The University has **invested** around £650,000 in a range of three-year Fellowships Following the success of the Fellowships, we've **adopted a similar scheme** for Scholars. (Glasgow)*
- (21) *The LMU **cooperates with** more than 400 **renowned partners** from around the world - at all levels of study on research to **management**. (Ludwig Maximilian)*
- (22) *As a broadly based, non-profit research university, UiO has access to good **public funding schemes**. (Oslo)*
- (23) *Moscow University enjoys the right for **entrepreneurship and property income** which is essential for the University **innovative development**. (Lomonosov)*
- (24) *According to the University's Strategic Plan, the University's role as a force for social responsibility is particularly manifested as follows: **bringing important partners** into the University's **sphere of influence**. Active community relations improve the University's **operating conditions**, which include **resources** for research and teaching, **good cooperative networks, high-quality service concepts, success factors in student and staff recruitment, funding, and the University's reputation**. (Helsinki)*

By using the COMMERCE metaphor and describing university as a successful entrepreneur actively competing in the 'market' of higher education, it is intended to emotionally appeal to new students or 'consumers'. The institution of higher education is presented as another commodity worth obtaining in the "market of supply".

The findings about the conceptual metaphor HIGHER EDUCATION IS AN ACT OF COMMERCE in this study support the assumption that the social identity of European Universities is represented by extending the model of corporate identity the model competition-oriented due to the associated positive qualities entrenched by the personified metaphor .

5. Conclusion

This study has provided an evaluation of metaphor use in the mission statements of the first twenty European universities, according to the Webometrics ranking. The total set of 595 metaphorical expressions and the prevalent source domain of COMMERCE were identified. The use of the HIGHER EDUCATION IS A COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY metaphor has clarified the overall trend of market ideology underlying the narrative of the mission statements. This ideological pattern is reflected in the conceptualisation as follows.

University is perceived as a business person driven by its interest for competing in the race for supremacy, becoming stronger and gaining more benefits in terms of the increasing numbers of students, staff and achievements. The social role of the COMMERCE metaphor allows us to understand the complexity of both creators and receivers' expectations. The positive representation of a higher institution in competitive and commercial terms is aiming to appeal and attract. Accordingly, the extension of 'corporate identity' from business discourse to the discourse of higher education is expected to be appropriate and audience appealing.

This study admittedly has its limitations. Methodologically, the study only analysed the most prevalent source domains related to two conventionalised metaphors and did not investigate other source domains. Additionally, the data was analysed only by following Charteris-Black's three-stage model (2004) and procedurally employing Pragglejazz Group's MIP (2007), without using any corpus-method for generating semantic domains (Deignan 2005; Stefanowitsch 2006), which might provide more empirical evidence for analysing semantic patterns of linguistic metaphor. With regard to the interpretation of research results, the study may still need to explore further the relationship between the metaphor and their implied meaning, and the reasons underlying the strong orientation towards market ideology and competitiveness projected in the mission statements by the EU Universities studied in this paper. Addressing these limitations will be the goal of future research on this topic. Despite these limitations, the study offers a cognitive socio-linguistic approach to evaluating

metaphor in the mission statements of the most popular EU Universities and provides valuable insights into the ideological nature of higher education 'identity' as seen through the narrative of mission statements.

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