ARTS IN BUSINESS ENGLISH METAPHORS

Adina Oana NICOLAE
Universitatea Petrol-Gaze, Ploieşti

Abstract: *How are the conceptual domains of arts, dancing, music, theatre connected to the conceptual domain of economics? Via metaphorical correspondences, which, the present study asserts, are surprinsingly not scarce in the discourse of business English. The article shows how exactly these correspondences function in contemporary English journals and it provides insights into their cognitive and ideological significance.*
Keywords: *conceptual metaphor, business English, arts.*

Metaphor permeates economic commentary and thought. This is the main premise which the present article is built on. Conceived as the main mechanism that enables people to comprehend abstract concepts and manipulate abstract reasoning, metaphor understandably plays a crucial part in the discourse for specific purposes, the language of business and economics included. Current cognitive linguistics views acknowledge this role and would certainly benefit from multifarious contextualized evidence extracted from authentic usage that points to this cognitive weight of metaphorical correspondences.

In what follows we plan to restrain the field of investigation to a secondary discourse of business and economics, i.e. business journalese. This strand of discourse may reasonably be assumed to take over some of the metaphorical networks on which scientific discourse relies in economics. In Boyd's terms (Boyd, 1996: 481-532), metaphors in economics as a science may be either theory constitutive (the stepping stones in the development of new concepts, theses or theories, bridging the gap between the old and the new), terminological metaphors (instrumental in creating new terminology, therefore evolving into dead metaphors that become lexicalized) and pseudo-scientific metaphors (manifest in popularizing literature). As the ratio of the ones in the latter category will predictably be noteworthy in journalistic business discourse, we have chosen them to be the target of our linguistic inquiry. They also evince, as can be noted, higher novelty, being akin to literary ones, since the articles published in newspapers and magazines address non-expert, semi-expert and expert readership alike. Such pseudo-scientific metaphors may thus represent one of the true tokens of the secondary discourse under investigation. Our insight into how familiar knowledge about arts is metaphorically mapped in business journalese in English is meant to allow us to check some of the cognitive linguistic applications and implications of the metaphorical phenomenon.

The collection of linguistic data originates in a prestigious online database called *Business Source Complete*. It offers full text for more than 8,500 scholarly business journals and other sources, including full text for more than 1,100 peer-reviewed business publications. Coverage includes virtually all subject areas related to business. This database provides in full more than 350 of the top scholarly journals dating as far back as 1922 and is updated on a daily basis. The serach for metaphorical expressions was intuition-based, starting from lists of lemmas belonging to the semantic

BDD-A5664 © 2008 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:27 UTC)

field of arts which have been put together with the help of glosaries, dictionaries, lexicons and thesauri.

The first artistic domain which was found to be metaphorically exploited in business journals is that of music.

Two key entities have been inserted in the role of the agent playing some instrument or producing music, namely ECONOMY or A COMPANY IS A MUSICIAN. As such, the options include playing the same tune (agreeing or generating harmony) or a different one (suggestive for disgreeing). Novelty of products or economic strategies is metaphorically labelled as *a new tune*:

(1) '***Duet in tune*** with sub-Saharan growth with first index fund'
(2) '***Orchestrating*** six companies to ***play one tune***'
(3) 'Invesco and JO Hambro ***tune*** European strategies'
(4) 'Asian Budget Sector ***Sings Different Tune***'
(5) 'Most IT Plans and Business Plans ***Sing Different Tunes***'
(6) 'Grocer ***sings new tune*** in community involvement.'
(7) 'AOL ***Sings New Tune***: Web Store for Videos'
(8) '***A New Tune*** for High-End Audio'

The class of the most frequent pre-modifiers for the lexeme *tune* was found to include *sponsorship, partner* and genitive constructions, while adjectives as pre-modifiers (such as *sweet, happy, sad*) reflect positive or negative intention or effect:

(9) 'Smirnoff's ***sings sponsorship tune*** on Blue Note tour'
(10) 'Tomlin ***sings partner tune*** for EMI unit'
(11) 'Will GM once again ***sing*** Elmer's ***tune***? '
(12) 'Memphis Music ***Sings Sweet Tunes*** to Local Economy'
(13) 'Crossing new borders: Taco Bell ***sings happy tune*** at the Grammys'
(14) 'Restaurateurs ***sing sad tune*** about Branson'

The genitive construction is by far the most pervasive both for singing and playing tunes; it is forceful in that it suggests accompaniment or agreement with the entity embedded in the synthetic genitive:

(15) 'Nokia Won't ***Play*** iPhone's ***Tune***'
(16) 'Microsoft ***Plays*** Real's ***Tune***'

Additionally, the result of the economic move implied by the dynamic verb *to play* is transferred to the premodifier (*sponsorship, acquisitive, international*, etc):

(17) 'Molson ***plays*** sponsorship ***tune***'
(18) 'MTVi ***plays*** acquisitive ***tune***'
(19) 'UCI 5 ***plays*** international ***tune***'
(20) 'Linux vendors ***play*** Windows ***tune***'

A COMPANY IS A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT and MONEY IS A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT are two other persistent correspondences that use the musical instrument script to reach out to typical activities such as *fine-tuning, self-tuning, tuning up, tuning in*; money as a musical instrument features highly conventionalized expressions such as *to the tune of (a sum):*

(21) 'Ford ***fine-tunes*** Verve for North American tastes'
(22) 'Is It Time for a Company Car ***Tune-Up***? '
(23) 'Marketers and content providers ***tune in*** to podcasting's potential'
(24) 'IBM said it chose XIV and its Nextra architecture as it addresses the new requirements associated with next generation digital content, its ability to scale

BDD-A5664 © 2008 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:27 UTC)

dynamically, heal itself in the event of failure, ***self-tune*** for optimum performance and eliminate the management burden.'
(25) 'REVShare's Growth Spurs Investors to the ***Tune*** of $20M'
(26)'Columbs, Ga., Starts Triple Play to ***Tune*** of $80 Million '

A third significant scenario in music is that of the conductor orchestrating; it is relevant in business by the amplitude of the coordination, the joint effort and the harmony of the result it generally supposes; these aspects get highlighted by means of the metaphors A COMPANY IS A CONDUCTOR (27-32) or A BUSINESS LEADER IS A CONDUCTOR (33-34):

(27) 'Microsoft ***orchestrates*** an enterprise-ready BizTalk RFID platform.'
(28) 'The company ***orchestrates*** sales events, either in anticipation of a store closure or to help a retailer better position themselves for growth.'
(29) 'Success is partly due to the fact that Hong Kong is home to firms that ***orchestrate*** the production and flow of goods supplied by factories in the developing world to multinational retailers.'
(30) 'Amadeus ***orchestrates*** sale of Comtec'
(31) 'We compare two approaches the buyer could use to ***orchestrate*** this competition […]'
(32) 'The article reports on the problems facing the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries with its attempt to ***orchestrate*** an oil output reduction.'
(33) 'No matter where your title appears on the org chart, transformational change is usually difficult and often disruptive. But if organizational change is to take root, corresponding change of the organization's leaders must also take place. As leaders, we must ***orchestrate*** and embody such change efforts. '
(34) 'Amid the uncertainty of those first hours, the leadership team must make a range of decisions to ***orchestrate*** the company's response and manage the rest of its business.'

Economic agents may acquire a double status – that of musician, on the one hand, and that of dancer, on the other hand (COUNTRIES ARE MUSICIANS/ DANCERS); there is an implication of subordination of the latter to the former, suggested by the common practice of the musician imposing the rhythm and music in:
(35) 'Why should Europe ***dance to*** Germany's Economic ***Tune***?'

The previous metaphoric instantiation provides us with the opportunity of moving on to the second major set of correspondences, that which concerns the domain of dancing. The complexity, skills and rule-governed nature of doing business are metaphorically matched by the ones involved in dancing (DOING BUSINESS IS DANCING):
(36) 'In Deal ***Dance***, BHP and Rio Trip Over 'Shared' Partners'
(37) 'Recent Deals ***Dance*** On A Libor Floor'
(38) 'Learn the liability ***dance***'
(39) 'Latin American trusts ***dance to different beat***'
(40) 'Oncogene's Full ***Dance*** CardOncogene's Full Dance Card'
(41) 'Orion still ***dances*** with bankruptcy'

In particular, MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS ARE DANCING:
(42) 'Nominating Yahoo directors is likely to be Microsoft's next step in its takeover ***dance***.'

In her analysis of mergers and acquisitions-related metaphors, Koller (Koller, 2004: 114) concludes that even though the DANCING scenario could be an alternative

BDD-A5664 © 2008 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:27 UTC)

to the FIGHTING metaphor (statistically demonstrated to be prevalent in her corpus of business articles), it actually supports the dominant cluster metaphor.

Although DANCING has been considered a complex and eclectic conceptual domain, its usage may also be attributed to its potential integration into a larger cognitive framework, that of the evolutionary struggle, which combines a series of metaphorically rendered aspects – fighting, mating and feeding (Koller, 2004: 48). Dancing ties in with romance in a mating ritual. This supposition may be inferred from the overt textual co-existence of lemmas pointing to mating and dancing scenarios:

(43) 'Microsoft's Mating ***Dance***.'

(44) 'The Microsoft-Yahoo! Mating ***Dance***'

(45) 'Microsoft said as much, however politely, on Feb. 11 when it called the offer, extended on Jan. 31, "full and fair." The remarks came in response to Yahoo's earlier statement that Microsoft's bid "substantially undervalues" the company. The interchange is part of a delicate ***dance*** that, while cordial now, could soon turn hostile. "The process is following a reasonably well-known mating ritual," says Joseph Grundfest, a Stanford Law School professor and former commissioner of the Securities & Exchange Commission.'

(46) 'Will anyone dance with Qwest? With its bid for MCI rebuffed, despite being higher than Verizon's, telecom's ***wallflower*** may have to look for a new partner.'

(47) 'Once a ***hot date*** in the telecom world, Qwest has been a ***wallflower*** since this market began to slide four years ago.'

(48) 'The awkward mating ***dance*** of Corroon and Willis'

(49) 'Which of Lone star's suitors will ***get the dance***?'

The mating frame, projected against the journalistic background, allows the writer to expand the metaphor to some conventionally unused parts of the dancing scenario – notice *the hot date* or *the wallflower* elements. We cannot but support the conclusion already expressed by Koller (Koller, 2004: 126) that one of the dancing partners is constructed as a feminized and static entity. The examples above assist and even collapse with the MATING metaphor, raising the central issue of gendering.

The gender aspect prevails over the motion aspects incumbent in dancing as a human activity; occurrences of metaphorical expressions where motion in dancing is emphasized were found to be rather rare:

(50) 'Trying to ***dance away*** from default'

(51) '***Dances*** with debts: why Orion is ***reeling***'

(52) 'Salinas' flashy ***new step*** in the Mexican debt ***dance***'

It is the type of dance that may be occasionally stressed so as to clarify the reason, purpose or circumstances of the respective economic activity; *dicey* or *daring* could signal risk, while *precarious* and *death* point out dark prospects:

(53) 'Google's Dicey ***Dance*** in China'

(54) 'Supply and demand do a precarious ***dance***'

(55) 'Africa: from heady hopes to ***a dance*** of death'

(56) 'A Cable mogul's daring ***dance*** on the high wire'

The animizing metaphor A COMPANY IS AN ANIMAL turns out to yield repeated blends with the dancing scenario (A COMPANY IS A DANCING ANIMAL):

(57) '***Dances*** with ***wolves***' (the article presents the author's views on the impact of Retail Delivery Report on insurers.)

BDD-A5664 © 2008 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:27 UTC)

(58) ‘Making the ***Elephant Dance***’ (the article profiles Lewis B. Campbell, CEO of Textron Inc. Campbell turned around Textron's finances after an economic downturn between 1999 and 2001 by changing the decentralized company into one with a single strategic vision, winning over managers and skeptical Wall Street analysts in the process)
(59) ‘Nestle: ***An Elephant Dances***’
(60) ‘***Slow dance*** with the ***dragon***’
(61) ‘Getting two big ***elephants to dance***’

Although, as Eubanks noted (in Koller, 2004: 127), the attributive qualities of dance such as grace or rhythm are systematically disregarded, they are indirectly accentuated by means of the choice of large, awkward, ungraceful animals (such as *wolves, elephants, dragons*) seeming to suggest that dancing or business in this case is a remarkable success.

Last, but not least, a third metaphorical dimension seems to interconnect money and theatre. MONEY IS AN ACTOR whose performance is of interest to the audience:
(62) ‘The euro has finally turned the corner. After ***a miserable performance*** in the first two years, at least in terms of the exchange rate, the single European currency seems to have confirmed its year-end recovery against the dollar.’
(63) ‘The Romanian economic story is positive and the ***leu*** is one of the best if not the ***best performing*** currency in the region against the euro. ’
(64) ‘[The article] examines the ***performance*** of the United States dollar in relation to the ‘Japanese yen and the German mark, for January 14th, 1997. Strong ***performance*** of dollar over yen and the mark; Factors influencing strong performance of dollar.’
(65) ‘According to the author, the region's issuers are keeping away from the euro due to the currency's volatile ***performance***, lack of familiarity by Asian issuers with the currency and a corresponding ignorance of Asian credit by European investors.’

The mapping MONEY IS AN ACTOR proved particularly fertile when the euro was introduced as the single European currency in a series of countries, so that the *debut* parallel was often resorted to in the press at that time:
(66) ‘The ***much anticipated*** euro ***debuted*** last Monday as Europe's common currency for 11 European nations. ’
(67) ‘Euro finally ***makes its debut***. ’
(68) ‘Ukraine to launch euro ***debut*** next week.’
(69) ‘Euro ***Debuts***, Debate Continues.’
(70) ‘Euro's ***Debut*** Has Little Impact on U.S., for Now.’
(71) ‘Behind the Scenes With The ***Euro***. ’

The same ground-breaking event was alternatively depicted by means of MONEY IS A SHOW or A THEATRE HALL metaphors:
(72) ‘Academic research, in turn, developed its own views, which turned out to be critical of some orientations, yet it generally recognizes that, in the end, the launch of the euro has been ***a major success***.’
(73) ‘The euro ***opened with great fanfare*** in January, rising 5% on the first day of trading.’

To round up, we should mention that money itself oscillates between various identities which it acquires metaphorically, one of which underscores it as a work of art, but something beyond its artefact nature (MONEY IS A WORK OF ART):

BDD-A5664 © 2008 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:27 UTC)

(74) 'I intend to focus my remarks on the challenges presented by the ***creation*** of the euro and the execution of monetary policy in a rapidly changing world.'

As these insights have not been integrated into a quantitative analysis, we shall only formulate a few conclusions that are related to the qualitative side of the linguistic data presented so far.

Arts (music, dancing and theatre) are a typically non-violent, non-competitive form of expression. The anchoring of business into such a domain may have two implications. On the one hand, some of the metaphorical paralellisms, despite their peaceful undercurrents, are cunningly meant to underlie opposite corespondences; it happens so with the dancing scenario, incorporable in the mating ritual, itself a manifestation of the evolutionary struggle. The dominant usage of the metaphor DOING BUSINESS IS WAGING WAR is therefore reinforced rather than undermined. On the other hand, the arts metaphors supply exposure to a discourse that challenges the dominant cognitive model, aiming at reconfiguring the readers' conceptual landscape. This has already been asserted by Fairclough (Fairclough, 1995:30), who noticed that 'reporters bring [particular metaphoric models] to bear in interpreting events and source texts, models which [they] try to convey to audiences in the way they write".

While processing the text, the ideal reader may come to share the alternative mental model based on non-aggressiveness and creativity, or at least become aware of parallel conceptualizations. Alternative metaphors like the arts-related ones could therefore make a difference by virtue of their counter-discursive power.

Bibliography

Boyd, R., 'Metaphor and theory change: What is "metaphor" a metaphor for?', in Ortony, A., (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996

Business Source Complete, Available at www.ebscohost.com. Retrieved 15th March 2008

Fairclough, N., *Media Discourse*, Edward Arnold, London, 1995

Koller, V., *Metaphor and Gender in Business Media Discourse*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2004

BDD-A5664 © 2008 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.34 (2026-11-14 00:04:27 UTC)