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Context-induced metaphoric creativity in business media discourse

Контекстуальна метафорична креативність в дискурсі бізнес-медіа

Summary. *The aim of the research paper is to investigate the means of achieving context-induced metaphorical creativity in business media discourse. The paper provides a brief overview of the term “creativity” in the realm of humanities before diving deeper into metaphorical creativity. It highlights the main studies on metaphorical creativity conducted by a host of linguists such as G. Lakoff, E. Semino and others. A particular focus is given to Z. Kövecses’ notion of “context-induced” metaphorical creativity, which serves as the basis for this particular research effort. The paper introduces several examples to illustrate different cases of this phenomenon: 1) based on the immediate linguistic context; 2) based on knowledge about the participants of the discourse; and 3) based on the cultural context. These aspects are not mutually exclusive and can occasionally intertwine to produce unique metaphorical expressions. The article demonstrates how brand names, the scope of a particular company’s activities, or a broader cultural context can serve as direct linguistic triggers for metaphors in news headlines. For example, the brand name Apple motivates the use of the conceptual metaphor COMPETITION IS EATING, which is verbalized in the phrase “take a big bite out of the banks”. At the same time, the use of the phrase “sweeten” in a headline about Hershey’s stock financial outlook is motivated by knowledge about the company. Some headlines may combine several contextual factors at once. This research paper is relevant because it makes it easier to understand how creative language, specifically metaphors, can be used in business news. The paper might be useful for linguists, marketing professionals, and business experts who want to communicate more effectively.*

Key words: *conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), cultural context, immediate linguistic context, discourse participants, brand names.*

Анотація. Дослідницька стаття має на меті вивчити засоби досягнення контекстуальної метафоричної креативності в дискурсі бізнес-медіа. Стаття пропонує короткий огляд терміну «креативність» в галузі гуманітарних наук, а також визначення саме метафоричної креативності. Лінгвістична розвідка висвітлює основні дослідження з метафоричної креативності, які були проведені такими лінгвістами, як Дж. Лакофф, Е. Семіно та інші. Особлива увага приділяється поняттю З. Ковечеша про «контекстуальну» метафоричну креативність, яке служить основою для цієї лінгвістичної розвідки. Дослідницька стаття пропонує кілька прикладів для ілюстрації різних випадків метафоричної креативності: 1) на основі безпосереднього лінгвістичного контексту; 2) на основі знань про учасників дискурсу та 3) на основі культурного контексту. Ці аспекти не є взаємовиключними і можуть іноді переплітатися, щоб створювати багатозначні метафоричні вирази. Стаття демонструє, як назви брендів, логотипи, сфера діяльності певної компанії або ширший культурний контекст можуть служити безпосередніми лінгвістичними тригерами для метафор у заголовках бізнес-новин. Наприклад, назва бренду Apple (укр. «яблуко») мотивує використання концептуальної метафори COMPETITION IS EATING, яка вербалізується у фразі “take a big bite out of the banks” (укр. «відкусити значну частину банківського ринку»). У той же час використання дієслова “sweeten” (укр. «підсолодити») у заголовку про прибутковість акцій Hershey було вмотивовано знаннями про діяльність компанії. Деякі заголовки можуть поєднувати відразу кілька контекстуальних факторів. Дослідницька стаття є актуальною, оскільки полегшує розуміння того, як креативна мова, зокрема метафори, може використовуватися у заголовках бізнес-новин та підвищувати їх прагматичний потенціал. Стаття може бути корисною для лінгвістів, маркетингових фахівців та експертів у сфері бізнесу.

Ключові слова: теорія концептуальної метафори (ТКМ), культурний контекст, безпосередній лінгвістичний контекст, учасники дискурсу, назви брендів.

Introduction. Creativity has been a complex and multi-faceted subject to study since the 19th century. It became its own field of research in psychology around 1950, primarily credited to J. P. Guilford. There is a general consensus that creativity involves something both new and task-appropriate, and scholars of the likes of F. Barron, B. Hennessey & T. Amabile, D. Simonton, R. Sternberg, and others have expanded the definition to include various components like *high quality, surprise, aesthetics, and the creation of a product* [1, p. 44].

Metaphorical creativity refers to the innovative use of metaphors to express or explain concepts in a new way. Unlike conventional metaphors, which rely on well-established mappings between the source domain (the concept being borrowed) and the target domain (the concept being described), creatively used metaphors often stretch, combine, or alter these mappings in a way that adds more nuance.

G. Lakoff, M. Turner, and R. Gibbs have identified several main techniques for using metaphor in creative ways across various genres: extension, elaboration, combination, and questioning [2, p. 53–54]. These techniques exploit unused elements of a conventional metaphor, realize it in an unusual way, combine two different metaphors, or explicitly question the appropriateness of a metaphor, respectively.

Z. Kövecses has also introduced the idea of “context-induced” metaphors, which are shaped by such factors as immediate linguistic context, knowledge about major entities in the discourse, physical setting, social setting, immediate cultural context, thereby adding a more dynamic and contextual layer to the understanding of metaphorical creativity [3, p. 56]. Kövecses’s framework serves as the basis for this study.

Various studies have been conducted in order to explore metaphorical creativity. For instance, a study by M. Romano and M. Porto delves into how metaphors differently develop and evolve depending on their socio-cultural context and the discourse situations in which they are used. It contrasts two metaphors: *SIGNS OF A POSITIVE CHANGE ARE GREEN SHOOTS*, which became widespread in Spain during the 2009 economic crisis, and *OBSTACLES FOR SUCCESS ARE AN ASH CLOUD*, which emerged in British newspapers in 2010 during the volcanic ash crisis. The study concludes that the distinct sociocultural and political landscapes in Spain and the UK significantly influenced the development, entrenchment, and meaning of these metaphors in language [5].

A recent research paper by P. Pérez-Sobrino, E. Semino, I. Ibarretxe-Antuñano, V. Koller, and I. Olza explores the surge of creative metaphoric expressions used to talk about the Covid-19 pandemic. The research identifies patterns of metaphorical creativity, such as creative realizations, one-off source domains, shifts in valence, and source domains specific to particular discourse communities [6].

The purpose of the article is to explore the means of achieving context-induced metaphoric creativity in business news headlines.

As noted by M. White and H. Herrera, headlines serve as “the shop window display of newspapers” capturing the reader’s interest and persuading them to read further. Considering the historical significance and sales performance of newspapers, it’s evident that headlines are effective in achieving these objectives [4, p. 135].

Building on the notion of metaphorical creativity, it is intriguing to examine how such linguistic tools are deployed in the highly impactful domain of news headlines. Headlines perform multiple functions, including capturing attention, signaling the writer’s stance, and guiding reader interpretation –challenges that often lead journalists to use concise, sometimes sensational, language and metaphors to encapsulate complex ideas.

Since headlines are often the first thing readers encounter, they lack co-textual referents, making the creative use of context-induced metaphorical language particularly crucial. This initial positioning places added importance on leveraging various forms of context (linguistic, discourse participant-based, and cultural) to immediately engage the reader [4, p. 142].

Methods and material. In the course of the research effort, various headlines in prominent business news outlets, such as Bloomberg, the Financial Times, and Seeking Alpha, were explored to determine specific instances when the usage of particular metaphors was influenced by the immediate linguistic context, the knowledge about discourse participants or some broader cultural context.

To analyze headlines with context-induced metaphoric creativity, a two-pronged approach of contextual and conceptual analysis was deployed. First, a contextual analysis was performed to explore how different factors could influence the usage of particular metaphors in these headlines. This required analyzing the entire articles associated with the headlines to ascertain the aptness of specific metaphoric expressions within its broader context. Then, metaphorical modeling was employed to determine how the underlying conceptual metaphors are used within these headlines and identify source domains and target domains that are framed in the “X IS Y” metaphorical structure.

Results and discussions. The immediate linguistic context for context-induced metaphors refers to the specific words or phrases within the discourse that guide or influence the choice of metaphors. These words or phrases provide a cue that makes certain metaphors more relevant or meaningful than they would be in a different context. In essence, the immediate linguistic context acts as a “trigger” that prompts readers or listeners to connect the metaphorical expression with a particular subject matter.

Example 1: “*Will Apple take a big bite out of the banks?*” (Financial Times, April 2023)

In this headline, the use of the term “*big bite*” is evidently guided by the brand name “Apple”. Given that an apple is conventionally associated with the action of “biting”, the metaphorical language is both contextually appropriate and creatively relevant to the subject matter which deals with Apple Inc’s incursion into the banking sector. This use aligns with the high-level schematic metaphor COMPETITION IS EATING, wherein Apple’s competitive move is framed as eating – or taking a “big bite” out of – a share of the banking industry.

Example 2: “*Target Hits The Bullseye*” (Seeking Alpha, May 2021)

Here, the name “*Target*” provides the immediate linguistic context that selects the metaphor “*hits the bullseye*”. The phrase fits within the broader metaphor SUCCESS IS ACCURACY, where hitting a bullseye

symbolizes achieving a goal. In this case, the context provided by the brand name “Target” offers a highly coherent and creative utilization of metaphor.

Example 3: *“Oracle Foresees ‘Largest Q1 Ever’”* (The Street, 2007)

The use of the term *“foresees”* is influenced by the company name “Oracle”, commonly associated with prophetic abilities. Here, the metaphorical expression situates itself within the high-level schematic metaphor PREDICTION IS SIGHT, where Oracle’s ability to predict financial success in the first quarter is framed as a form of seeing into the future.

Example 4: *“Puma Sharpens Its Claws”* (Bloomberg)

“Puma leaps higher as outlook improves” (The Financial Times, 2006)

Both headlines derive their metaphorical expressions – *“sharpens its claws”* and *“leaps higher”* – from the immediate context provided by the brand name “Puma”, which is a species of large wild cats. The first fits within the high-level conceptual metaphor BUSINESS PREPARATION IS ARMING, and the second falls under IMPROVEMENT IS ASCENT. These metaphors are made more salient and contextually relevant due to the brand name’s association with an agile and ferocious animal.

Example 5: *“Caterpillar’s Slowing to a Crawl in China”* (BNB Bloomberg, 2019)

This headline suggests that Caterpillar, a well-known construction and mining equipment company, is experiencing a decrease in business activities or growth in China. The metaphor *“slowing to a crawl”* is influenced by the company’s name “Caterpillar”, which is a creature known for its slow and deliberate movement. This is a great example of the effect of immediate linguistic context. The conceptual metaphor at play here is BUSINESS PROGRESS IS MOVEMENT.

Knowledge about the participants in the discourse – the sender of a message, the recipient, and the topic – is crucial for context-induced metaphors because it presupposes the selection, interpretation, and impact of the metaphor. Understanding the context in which the metaphor appears, including the entities involved and their specific characteristics or roles, can significantly enrich the metaphor’s meaning and resonance.

Example 1: *“Tesla’s price cuts accelerate the EV market’s first real recession stress test”* (CNBC, January 2023)

In the example above, the verb *“accelerate”* is used due to Tesla’s identity as an electric vehicle manufacturer, aligning with the metaphor PROGRESS IS ACCELERATION. The metaphor thus communicates that Tesla’s actions are speeding up or intensifying a specific event or process within the EV market, in this case, a “stress test” induced by recession. Within economics and finance, a “stress test” usually refers to an analysis or simulation designed to determine the ability of a given

financial entity to deal with an economic crisis. When related to the EV market, it symbolizes the market's resilience or vulnerability under economic pressures.

Example 2: *"Hershey sweetens annual profit forecast even as demand wavers"* (Reuters, July 2023)

The verb *"sweetens"* verbalized the metaphor IMPROVEMENT IS SWEETENING. The metaphor was chosen due to Hershey's identity as a chocolate and confectionery manufacturer. The metaphor, which relies on pleasantness associated with sweetness, implies that Hershey is improving or enhancing its annual profit forecast. It aligns the company's financial prospects with universally relatable sensory experiences, thus making the information given in the headline more relatable and impactful for the audience.

Example 3: *"Pfizer Attempts To Inject Optimism Into Stock With COVID-19 Vaccine"* (Forbes, September 2020)

The use of the term *"inject"* is influenced by Pfizer's role as a pharmaceutical company. This fits into the overarching metaphor ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENT IS MEDICAL HEALING, where the introduction of a COVID-19 vaccine is portrayed as injecting or infusing optimism into the company stock. This is both contextually apt and creatively tied to the core business of Pfizer. Given the global impact of COVID-19 and the anticipation surrounding vaccine developments, the metaphor resonates on a universal level due to the global discourse surrounding the pandemic.

Example 4: *"Starbucks Brews Up Growth"* (CNBC, November 2009)

In this headline, the term *"brews up"* creatively leverages the brand name "Starbucks", which is universally associated with coffee brewing. This falls within the overarching metaphor DEVELOPMENT IS BREWING, where Starbucks' growth is symbolized as brewing up like coffee. The use of this term is both contextually suitable and creatively connected to the main business activity of Starbucks.

Example 5: *"FedEx delivers gains, here's how to play this name"* (CNBC, June 2022)

The term *"delivers gains"* takes its cue from the brand name "FedEx", a company known for its delivery services. The metaphor fits into the overarching schema SUCCESS IS DELIVERY, where the company's profits are described as something FedEx "delivers". This is both creatively and contextually relevant due to FedEx's primary business function.

Culturally influenced metaphors borrow phrases or themes from popular media, folklore, or shared experiences to impart their messages more compellingly. By leveraging popular culture, they become immediately resonant and more emotionally evocative. This makes the information that is being conveyed more impactful.

Example 1: “*Winter is Coming’ for Chinese Companies*” (Bloomberg, September 2021)

In this headline, the phrase “*winter is coming*” is borrowed from the popular television show “Game of Thrones”, where it signifies impending doom or hardship. Within the cultural context of a widespread understanding of this phrase, it stands as a warning, aligning with the high-level metaphors DANGER IS DARKNESS/ADVERSITY IS COLDNESS. The headline sends a message that Chinese companies are headed toward difficult times, leveraging cultural knowledge for heightened impact.

In the study on horror movies and the cognitive ecology of primary metaphors, B. Winter examined the recurring theme EVIL IS DARK. The study observes that darkness is a prevailing setting in horror films, often serving as the environment where evil entities or catastrophic events manifest [7].

Example 2: “*Sequoia Capital Finally Gets ‘Red-Pilled’ on Crypto Investing*” (Bloomberg, December 2021)

Here, the term “*red-pilled*” is a cultural reference to the film “The Matrix”, where taking a red pill means accepting an unsettling truth. In this context, it fits the high-level metaphor ENLIGHTENMENT IS AWAKENING. The use of the term suggests that Sequoia Capital has finally come to understand the reality and potential of crypto investing. In the aforementioned example, Bloomberg employs a cultural touchstone from an extremely famous movie to make this specific point.

Example 3: “*Sears Holdings: breaking bad*” (The Financial Times, January 2013)

The phrase “*breaking bad*” is a reference to the television series “Breaking Bad”, which revolves around a man turning to illegal activities. This fits within the metaphors FAILURE IS CRIMINALITY and FAILURE IS A DESCENT INTO CHAOS. The headline suggests that Sears is not just failing but doing so in a way that is profoundly damaging, much like the show’s main character. The metaphor is highly effective due to its rich cultural connotation and the emotions and imagery associated with “Breaking Bad”.

Example 4: “*Intern Hunger Games in Full Swing With VC Shop’s Public Rankings*” (Bloomberg, December 2021)

The broader cultural reference here is to the “Hunger Games” series by Suzanne Collins. In this series, the Hunger Games are a televised event where participants, or “tributes”, are forced to fight to the death in a controlled environment. The headline above evokes the dystopian world of the “Hunger Games” series, where individuals are pitted against each other in a brutal competition for survival. By borrowing from the “Hunger Games” lexicon, the headline paints a vivid picture of a high-pressure,

competitive environment within Insight Partners, where interns are publicly ranked based on various performance metrics.

Example 5: “*Damocles’ sword is set to tumble above a commodity supercycle*” (Bloomberg, July 2021)

The “*Sword of Damocles*” is an expression that derives from a classical story that represents impending doom or the feeling of a perpetual threat for those in positions of power. The story tells of Damocles, a courtier in the court of Dionysius II of Syracuse, who, after expressing a wish to swap places with the king to enjoy his wealth and power, found himself seated beneath a sword suspended by a single horsehair. The term “*commodity supercycle*” refers to prolonged periods of high commodity prices, often driven by increased demand, supply constraints, or a combination of both. The metaphor depicts substantial downfall or disruption (“*sword... set to tumble*”) in the commodities market due to unstable conditions and inherent risks.

In the example below, the combined effects of both the immediate context about the discourse participants and the broader cultural context are at play.

“*Microsoft-Activision Enters Final Boss Battle With CMA*” (August 2023, Bloomberg)

This headline employs the phrase “*final boss battle*”, which immediately evokes the realm of video gaming. In gaming culture, a “*final boss*” is the ultimate obstacle before winning a game. Here, the headline aligns with the high-level schematic metaphor CHALLENGES ARE OPPONENTS, more specifically, REGULATORY APPROVAL IS A FINAL BOSS BATTLE.

“Activision”, a company known for its video games, provides the immediate context as a discourse participant, making the “*final boss*” metaphor particularly resonant and apt. The cultural context is provided by the widespread familiarity with gaming terminology like “*final boss*”, understood to represent a final, major obstacle or challenge.

The effectiveness of the metaphor hinges on the dual contextual layers. On one level, those familiar with Activision’s business immediately understand the suitability of using a gaming metaphor. On another level, even those unfamiliar with Activision but familiar with gaming culture can grasp the gravity of the “battle” with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), interpreting it as a make-it-or-break-it moment for the merger.

Conclusions. Through various examples, the research paper demonstrates how brand names often serve as the catalyst for metaphorical language, enriching the headline’s impact and resonance. For instance, headlines about Oracle “foreseeing” its financial performance leverage the

company's association with prophetic abilities, fitting within a high-level schematic metaphor that equates prediction with sight.

Moreover, the analysis explores the headlines that are shaped by popular culture, folklore, or shared experiences, providing a culturally resonant and emotionally evocative context. Phrases like “*winter is coming*” for Chinese companies not only capitalize on widespread understanding of a popular television show, but also align with high-level metaphors like DANGER IS DARKNESS and ADVERSITY IS COLDNESS.

Interestingly, some headlines effectively combine both immediate context and broader cultural narratives. An example relating to Activision and its “*final boss battle*” with the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) not only resonates due to the gaming company's core business but also becomes more impactful through the cultural familiarity with the term “final boss” in gaming.

In summary, this study underscores the nuanced ways in which metaphorical language, contextualized by both immediate linguistic factors and broader cultural knowledge, serves to enhance the meaning and impact of headlines.

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