

“FAMILY” METAPHORS IN BUSINESS ENGLISH

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In recent years, much research has demonstrated that metaphors play an important role in business English. Business involves strategy, planning, losing and winning as warfare and fighting does, hence, the metaphors of war are numerous in this sphere [1]. Other metaphors used in business English refer to the fields of sport and gambling [2, 3].

One of the semantic fields the constituents of which act as sources for metaphors in business English is *family*. The use of family metaphors in business English has been a matter of a large dispute over the recent years. The growing necessity to control workers and work processes gave rise to using the conceptual metaphor *a company (firm, etc.) is a family*.

Business leaders took to family metaphors because the family terminology provided a safe alternative to authoritative language and class terminology when talking about labor relations.

This notion engendered a range of polemical articles stating that it is inadmissible to associate a company with a family in any way. The arguments on both sides, however, employed little or nothing from the linguistic researches on the use of metaphors in the language and their impact on human behaviour. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's theory of metaphor [4] provides a basis for describing everyday cognitive strategies in using linguistic models and thus, making it possible to uncover both individual and collective patterns of thought and action. Lack of supporting material on both sides in the controversy surrounding family metaphors in

business English has created an opportunity to investigate the family metaphors in business English from the points of statistics, semantics and frequency of occurrence in business discourses.

According to the modern publications, the conceptual metaphor *a company is a family* is currently used by business authorities to serve the purpose of understanding family relations in terms of business realities. Nikki Mandell [5] describes the institution of “welfare managers” and argues that they looked to the Victorian family as a model for workplace relationships.

The opponents of use of the conceptual metaphor *a company is a family* point out a lot of discrepancies in the essence of this metaphor and its semantic associations [6].

However, in the publications we have studied on the topic in question, we found no mention of research of language metaphors which form the conceptual metaphor *a company is a family*.

The Combinatory Dictionary of the English Language [7] offers a number of word combinations used with the lexemes *family*, *company* and *firm*. The analysis of the given word combinations, however, has shown no coincidence in lexical compatibility of these concepts.

The defining of the lexical components of the semantic field *family* in the modern English language was the next stage of our research. For this purpose we used the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language [8]. As a result we received a list of 18 lexemes directly concerning the semantic field *family*: *father/dad/daddy; mother/mum; husband; wife; son; daughter; brother; sister; grandfather; grandmother; aunt; uncle; child/baby/kid*.

After we received the list of lexemes of the semantic field *family* we started identification of language metaphors in the business English language which included the aforementioned lexemes. Our basic source of information was The English-Russian Dictionary of Modern Business Language [9], containing more than 18 000 entries. As a result we received a database of 52 positions – the language metaphors containing the lexemes from the semantic field *family*, such as: *aunt Millie* ‘inexperienced investor’; *baby billboard* ‘advertising poster panel in public transport (i.e. small)’; *big daddy* ‘the most important person among similar people’;; *daughter company* ‘subsidiary’; *divorce* ‘separation of previously merged companies’; *father and sons* ‘a bonded stock with subsequent emission of new tranches’; *granny bond* ‘an index-linked savings certificate, formerly only available to persons over retirement age, hence the name’; *mother’s day* ‘a day, usually once a month, when hardship allowances are given out’.

Our next step was to carry out language modelling of the metaphors (after George Lakoff) to confirm or disprove the conceptual metaphor *a company is a family*. A careful study of 143 authentic business-related texts found in different Internet sources showed that the family lexemes in the metaphors merely replace the corresponding business terms but allow no language modelling. For example, the expression *my dear old father* cannot stand for *my dear old boss*. Our attempts proved the language modelling in the sphere of family metaphors in business English ineffective, thus suggesting the artificial character of the conceptual metaphor *a company is a family*.

Our search for verification of the results of our research encouraged us to turn to bi-nominative constructions after A. Wierzbicka [10]. We assumed that bi-nominative constructions would help us clarify the reasons

why the family lexemes appeared in the metaphors by establishing their semantic associations. Thus, we worked out semantic associations of the given metaphors. The semantic associations then were presented in the form of bi-nominative constructions N_1 is N_2 , where N_1 stands for a lexeme from the semantic field family, and N_2 – its semantic association. So the lexeme *dad* associates with the concept *authority*, hence the construction *dad–authority*.

On the following stage of our research it was necessary to verify the conformity of the semantic associations to the linguistic-cultural realities of the modern English language. Thus we applied to philology students of Birmingham University (via the Internet), as well as MSLU students of the modern English language, requesting them to participate in a survey. We drew up a questionnaire which contained the list of lexemes from the semantic field *family* as well as the list of semantic associations obtained as the result of our research. The participants were asked to match the family lexemes from the offered list and the corresponding semantic associations and to generate bi-nominative-type constructions N_1 is N_2 based on their own feeling of the language. The results show 93,2 % and 89,7 % of coincidence respectively. This allows us to conclude that the semantic associations obtained as the result of our research reflect the actual perception of the abovementioned metaphors in the linguistic-cultural realities of the modern English language.

Now when we could be sure about the consistency of our associations we were able to draw conclusions about the role of family metaphors and the conceptual metaphor *a company is a family*, in particular, in business English communication. The results show that family metaphors do not employ the meanings of loyalty, common goal or team work. Instead, they

serve as explanations of random business facts through something close and clear to all people – family relations. In other words, the conceptual metaphor *a company is a family* should be understood as family relations help us illustrate and thus better understand certain business realities. This means that, according to the English language, a company is not actually perceived as a family unit in any way. Thus, the conceptual metaphor *a company is a family* has an artificial origin and family metaphors are used for better understanding business realities in terms of family relations.

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