***Metaphor and gender in business media discourse:
A critical cognitive study.***
Veronika Koller.

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Reviewed by Charlotte White

Metaphor and Gender in Business Media Discourse: A critical cognitive study addresses the metaphors that dominate business media discourse and argues that they create an aggressive and gender-biased working climate. Koller organizes the book into six chapters that demonstrate, respectively, how metaphors carry a gender bias, the cognitive effects of metaphors, her research methods, the prevalence of metaphors on war and evolutionary struggle (or 'fighting'), and her conclusion, which analyzes the negative effects of these metaphors and suggests more positive alternatives. Throughout the book Koller investigates how metaphors create and perpetuate gender bias by exploiting aggressive language in business media texts. Another strong aspect of the book is the author's analysis of socio-cultural and ideological functions of metaphors. Koller claims that by achieving a better understanding of aggressive metaphors we can improve or eliminate the hostile working climate they create as well as promote equality and partnership.

Throughout the book Koller argues that metaphors are used in the media as a way to make indirect reference to topics that are not openly discussed. Metaphors are effectively used to gain consumers' attention because they use imagery to provide explanations and thus a clearer understanding of complex ideas. In addition to using metaphors as explanatory devices, journalists use them to distance themselves from controversial statements and to avoid

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criticism. In short, metaphors allow journalists to avoid direct responsibility for their words. Koller draws examples from popular print media, such as *The Economist*, *Business Week*, *The Financial Times*, and *Fortune*. These sources allow the author to identify patterns in metaphor use, including the prevalence of war metaphors in business marketing texts and metaphors of evolutionary struggle in mergers and acquisitions texts. Koller claims that these sorts of aggressive metaphors provide a conceptual frame to the reader and therefore a particular understanding of issues.

In Chapter 1, Koller establishes the concept of ‘masculinized metaphors’ and briefly explains their use and what they accomplish. The reader is introduced to the ideational function of metaphor in media and, jointly, learns how this function shapes the aggressive and competitive mindset inherent to a free market society. Koller’s hypothesis is that ‘business media discourse is characterized by coherent metaphor clusters centering around the war metaphor, and this metaphor helps to ‘masculinize’ both that discourse and related social practices’ (5). In addition to introducing the reader to the ‘business is war’ metaphor, Koller demonstrates the aggression and male bias that accompany it. She explains that because both war and business have historically been male-dominated, business media tends to link the two through the use of imagery in metaphors, and in turn perpetuates the notion that business is predominantly a male or masculine affair.

Next, Koller provides a detailed outline of contemporary theories of metaphor, beginning with classical cognitive metaphor theory. This theory asserts, ‘metaphor is a conceptual phenomenon that is realized at the surface level of language’ (9). Koller explains the importance of blending theory and neural theory, which the author integrates within a critical approach to language. Koller then describes the use of primary and complex metaphors to illustrate how ‘cognition informs ideology in the form of (metaphoric) mental models which are drawn on in discourse production’ (42). This cyclical process allows metaphors to continue to produce ideologies that are socially accepted, as is illustrated by the use of metaphoric expressions in the media, and specifically, in business publishing.

In Chapter 3, Koller introduces the reader to the methods she used to collect and analyze metaphoric data in business media texts. Koller refrains from analyzing culture-specific phenomena, textual genres, and journalists’ gender identities because a more narrow approach allows her to focus solely on the frequency of metaphors and metaphoric clusters in business texts. Koller’s methods include locating metaphors in the texts and compiling words into lexical fields by categories based upon word classes. Koller focuses specifically on the linguistic concepts of transitivity and nominalization, in other words, she explores how aspects of words, such as tense, help to carry ideologies and how,

in turn, words and ideologies serve to conceptualize metaphors. She argues that tense is 'important as it promises to provide insights into how dynamic or static the model in fact is that is assumed to underlie the attested metaphoric expression' (62).

In Chapters 4 and 5, Koller presents the results of her analysis. Chapter 4 investigates metaphors of war, sport, game, and romance used in marketing texts. Chapter 5 analyzes metaphors of evolutionary struggle (fighting) and dancing employed in print media relating to mergers and acquisitions.

Chapter 4 illustrates that the socio-economic framework of capitalism in marketing is paralleled by a war and military framework in the 'fight' for consumers. As Koller states, 'the mind of the consumer forms the territory on which the battle is waged' by the marketer (109). Koller also handily shows the reader that sports metaphors are linked to aggressive competition and war. Boxing and football are presented as examples of sports that not only exhibit war-like behavior, but are also described in military terms, illustrated by the use of 'battlefield' to describe the playing field. Koller argues that metaphoric expressions of war and sports used in marketing continue to create a gender bias. What the author leaves unclear, however, is why only male aggression is linked to fighting, and specifically the supposed exclusion of women from non-military fighting is never addressed. Finally, Koller argues that the lack of romantic metaphors in marketing publications shows that they target male audiences.

Evolutionary struggle metaphors, such as hostile takeovers, are addressed in Chapter 5 in an analysis of texts dealing with mergers and acquisitions. Koller defines 'evolutionary struggle' as primarily encompassing fighting, feeding, and mating. The author suggests that expressions of fighting are dominant in evolutionary struggle metaphors and that females are deemed powerless objects of male aggression. This pattern is exemplified by language that casts the buyer in an acquisition as a dominant male figure and the bought entity as a powerless female figure. Similarly, 'feeding' metaphors used to describe mergers and acquisitions usually depict the 'feeder' as male and the 'food' as female. Violent mating metaphors serve to camouflage sexual violence against women and 'sustain a patriarchal order' (169), Koller argues.

Koller concludes by arguing for our need to find gender-neutral metaphors that are less aggressive. She claims that the 'media plays a pivotal role in shaping the expectations about people's behaviors' and places a large portion of the responsibility on journalists, stating that they 'should rise to the challenge of at least proposing non-violent metaphors' (178). Solutions include reducing the use of aggressive metaphors and the reinvention of old metaphors. The Internet is presented as the new 'driving force behind changing metaphoric concepts of marketing' (112). Furthermore, Koller notes that alternative metaphors do

not have to be completely new to be revolutionary, as old metaphors can be formulated to have positive influences.

Koller believes that these changes could lead to a more humane understanding of business leadership and competition, and potentially decrease the unnecessary stress that exists in the corporate world. The author explains that although capitalism is based upon competition, it does not need to spur metaphors of 'excessive aggression'. Competition can instead be illustrated through non-violent metaphoric forms, such as a racing, which valorizes a competitive edge, but illustrates it in a positive light. Koller offers hope that the hostility and gender bias that have been learned through the use of business metaphors can essentially be 'unlearned' by changing aggressive, male-dominated metaphors. The 'market economy and its inherent competition need not be conceptualized in terms of excessive aggression and antagonism' as there are alternative metaphoric expressions that offer a strong sense of competition in a non-violent way (175). Unfortunately, such a cognitive shift may be more difficult to achieve than Koller describes. In the current political climate it becomes apparent that not only is business war in metaphoric terms, but war itself has become an actual business, and it is perhaps therein that our most pressing struggle lies.