

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS: COOKING AND FOOD IN BUSINESS METAPHORS

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Abstract: The article sets out to disclose the range of applications and implications of the business media metaphors that draw on the more familiar cognitive domain related to food and cooking. The conclusions rely on a corpus-based approach, while the theoretical framework is provided by cognitive semantics.

Even a brief glance at a randomly chosen business magazine or newspaper may give the reader a feeling of ‘familiar territory’ due to an abundance of metaphoric language built on knowledge related to familiar everyday topics. Enforced use of metaphoric language heads towards the highly expressive, vivid and inventive style often sought and displayed in the printed press. Yet it does not fail to characterize even the ‘drier’ style of scholarly business articles. It is presumed, in the contemporary cognitive semantic framework, that this double-edged phenomenon goes on by virtue of the major cognitive role that metaphors play in any kind of discourse, the economic and business-oriented one included.

While vividness is an attention getter, metaphorical language achieves more than capturing the readers’ attention – metaphors encapsulate and prove their instrumental capability in constructing or explaining reality. Moreover, by favouring and restating particular metaphorical correspondences in actual discourse, journalists reinforce or even activate particular mental models in their readers’ cognition. That they also switch and play upon such mental models and correlated scenarios is just one easy move ahead.

Against the background of the previous considerations, the rationale for the subsequent investigation is the perceived re-occurrence of the food and cooking metaphors in business media discourse. The particularity of the mappings onto the FOOD domain resides in their relative homogeneity and systematicity. It will be demonstrated with authentic examples that the metaphors drawing on food and cooking ontological and epistemological considerations generally coagulate around a few major knots: BUSINESS ENTITIES ARE FOOD/DRINK, BUSINESS ENTITIES ARE (MAN)EATERS, ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IS COOKING, SUCCESS IS A DISH and ECONOMY IS FOOD/ DRINK.

The study is theoretically anchored in the contemporary theory of cognitive metaphor, pioneered by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Lakoff and Turner (1989) and developed by other cognitive linguists. The area of research was chosen to be an electronic corpus with English linguistic data in which the search was conducted manually starting from an expectation-based shortlist of lexemes related to food and cooking. This inferential procedure led to a series of metaphorical expressions being searched in the world’s largest full text business database, *Business Source Complete*¹, which contains 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.

One possible scenario emerging from the samples in the corpus depicts economic agents as actively involved in an act of cooking (ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES = COOKING); activities as different as elaborating strategies, branding, selling, accounting, mergers and acquisitions are all equated metaphorically to cooking - notably baking:

¹ *Business Source Complete*. Available: <http://www.ebscohost.com/> [2007, May 5]

- (1) 'Microsoft's SOA Strategy Is Ambitious, But *Half-Baked*'
- (2) 'Branding Can't Be *Half-Baked*'
- (3) 'Niche lines may boost *half-baked* sales'
- (4) '*Half-baked* Accounting?'
- (5) 'Aside from a few bank chief executive officers (CEO) who have squandered assets on *half-baked* acquisition [...]'

In particular, the business writers construct the social practice of economic institutions (usually companies) as cooks or chefs deftly mixing and handling ingredients according to unwritten recipes (COMPANY = CHEF):

- (6) 'Firms within strategic groups generally adopt similar strategic *recipes* and compete more intensely than firms across strategic groups.'
- (7) 'In Europe, bringing in big-name design talent has long been a *recipe* to the ongoing success of fashion houses, as evidenced by the relationship between Channel and Karl Lagerfeld.'
- (8) 'Is 'in with the new' really the *recipe* for in-house legal success?'
- (9) 'Central banks have perceived quantitative limits on monetary base as a sure *recipe* for far greater volatility in short-term interest rates.'
- (10) 'The author stresses that getting the assets of the clients on to the site is a priority, but the ability to get them off again is 1 vital *ingredient* often neglected.'
- (11) 'Key *ingredients* that are essential to the delivery of value and services for stakeholders.'

A general tendency to link cooking to improvisation, dishonest innovation, elaboration of a product with a view to deceiving the beneficiary has been detected to underlie the frequent metaphorical use of the informal phrasal verb '*to cook up*' especially in headlines:

- (12) '*Cook up* certainty solution, says FSA.'
- (13) 'McDonald's *Cooks Up* Energy-Savings Plan'
- (14) 'Pizza Chains *Cook Up* Ways To Battle Old, New Rivals'
- (15) 'Employers *cook up* ways to boost healthy living'
- (16) 'Chrysler *cooks up* a white-bread auto show'
- (17) 'Puma *cooks up* customizable shoe kiosk'
- (18) 'GPI *Cooks Up* Micro-Friendly Product'
- (19) 'Roadchef *cooks up* retention scheme'
- (20) 'Experts also suggest that retailers stay in contact with their suppliers for similar ideas and *cook up* some product demonstrations for less popular items.'

The same MORE IS UP metaphor is often encased in the iterative usage of the phrasal verb '*to spice up*' which aligns the resulting metaphor to the previously mentioned perspective upon economic agents as cooks; pragmatically speaking, spicing up conveys an additional implication of originality and variety:

- (21) 'New players *spice up* mortgage funds: Aviva'
- (22) 'CBA *spices up* investor portfolios.'
- (23) 'Seven growth stocks to *spice up* your blue-chip portfolio'
- (24) 'Variety is the *spice* of bond'
- (25) 'Innovation *spices* offshore market'

In the eating scenario it is success (or its negative counterpart) that is often metaphorically highlighted by means of the key lemmas *recipe* and *ingredients*, which point to SUCCESS = DISH:

- (26) ‘When asked about Mauritius' *recipe* for success, Sithanen said that there are many factors that account for the relative success of the country such as investments in human capital.’
- (27) ‘High real interest rates, rising inflation, poor fiscal dynamics and average growth prospects. Hardly the *recipe* for successful economic convergence with the European Union (EU).’
- (28) ‘They advance a theory of imperfect competition to successfully address these facts--suggesting that imperfect competition is a necessary *ingredient* for success.’
- (29) ‘How raw investment return is a key *ingredient* in investment success’
- (30) ‘When the IT department at Guardian decided to install a new life insurance and annuity administration application, the project seemed to *have all the ingredients* for success.’
- (31) ‘Thomas Sowell, an economist and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, who states that Democratic presidential hopeful Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton's economic policies *have all the ingredients* of disaster--more taxes, spending and hidden costs imposed on the economy.’

A parallel yet systematic mapping transposes the ontological status of food onto the domain of economic entities (ECONOMIC ENTITIES = FOOD). First and foremost this translation functions for the domain of money (MONEY = FOOD):

- (32) ‘But the more important question for investors is this: how much total return will be *eaten up* by this *termite* army of charges?’
- (33) ‘The article reports on the possibility that concerns about the credit *crunch* and the insistence of the U.S. Federal Reserve that it will not reduce interest rates will continue’
- (34) ‘To lure buyers, companies are offering some *sweeteners*.’

The relative prominence of the MONEY = FOOD metaphor is emphasized in the conventional treatment of money as a solid eatable product that can be sliced (MONEY = PIE):

- (35) ‘*Slice* your tax bill’
- (36) ‘A *slice* here, a *slice* there -- platform costs add up.’
- (37) ‘According to TowerGroup, a research and consulting firm in Needham, Massachusetts, the biggest challenge will be the increasingly competitive landscape within which platform providers will go head-to-head for a larger *slice* of the increased dollars that financial service are projected to spend for managed account technology.’
- (38) ‘A bigger *slice* of the pension pie.’
- (39) ‘Axa takes *slice* out of with-profits bonuses.’
- (40) ‘McDonald's is going to *slice* capital expenditures’
- (41) ‘The old divide between "them" and "us" is becoming blurred: many workers also own shares directly or through pension funds, which sooner or later will give them a *slice* of profits.’
- (42) ‘Advance corporation tax refers to the taxation system used by the government of Great Britain to take a *slice* of income from the dividends that companies paid to their shareholders.’

The pie configuration is extended to other economic entities such as a market, a company, a takeover, a sales figure, a rate (MARKET / COMPANY/ / TAKEOVER / FINANCIAL FIGURE = PIE) in:

- (43) 'Newspapers and Yahoo are in talks to *reslice* the ad *pie*'
- (44) 'PruProtect is aiming at 10% *slice* of market'
- (45) 'Retail gets bigger *slice* of the *pie*.'
- (46) 'DKN buys *slice* of Tulare'
- (47) 'Getting Your *Slice* Of the Takeover *Pie*.'
- (48) 'Advisers get *slice* of Western Pacific.'
- (49) 'HBOS PLC has the biggest *slice* of the mortgage market and it is also aggressively growing the rest of its business'
- (50) 'Top 10 funds take an 11% *slice* of total sales'
- (51) 'Yields on Treasury Fall, as Hopes Rise That Fed Could *Slice* Federal-Funds Rate by Half a Point.'

The innate temptation in food products is transferred into the economic domain by recurrent associations of money with sweet, delicious food (A DEAL/ MONEY = SWEETS):

- (52) 'A *Sweet* Deal for Investors?'
- (53) '*Sweet* Deal'
- (54) 'Aberdeen ponders *sweet* equity deal'
- (55) 'Investors could miss out on *sweet* spot'
- (56) 'Comments on the issue of Venture Capital Trust (VCT) managers using their investor's money to finance personal *sweet* equity deals in Great Britain.'
- (57) '*Sweet* equities leave VCT investors with bitter taste.'
- (58) '*Sweet* deals: a piece of the pie for staff'
- (59) 'As some 12 million cell-phone users are expected to switch carriers this year, now that a new law has made their numbers portable, the nation's largest carriers rolling out a steady stream of *sweet* deals'
- (60) 'Loan *sweet* loan'

An analogous and deeply entrenched metaphorical representation of money in the business discourse is MONEY = DRINK, as a few examples illustrate:

- (61) 'In 2007, Enterprise Financial Services Corp. reported that full-year earnings rose 14%, to \$17.6 million, and that *diluted* earnings per share rose 2.9%, to \$1.40 a share.'
- (62) 'It now anticipates net income for the fourth-quarter ending February 2, 2008 of between \$350 million and \$470 million, or between \$2.59 and \$3.48 per fully *diluted* share.'
- (63) 'A few banks are preparing funds to jump into the euro craze, and some are considering the move, but it will most likely be the fund companies that truly test the new currency *waters*.'
- (64) 'But fund managers have been struggling to funnel this *deluge* of money into the market.'
- (65) 'Reinsurance Market Review Concludes That *Massive Tidal Wave* Of New Capital Is Too Little/Too Late.'
- (66) 'Greenback *tsunami*. Influence of the dollar *flow* in preventing possible global recession.'
- (67) 'Others are operating waiting lists – often of several months – to slow down the *flood* of money.'

The wrapping of this ontological thread into the substance of money as an appealing drink results in MONEY = TASTY DRINK:

- (68) 'Juicy perks at Apple'
- (69) 'City of Kiev battles market's ills with *juicy* yield premium'
- (70) 'O J Simpson book produces *juicy* sales'
- (71) '*Juicy* spreads are hot topic as market gets back on its feet'
- (72) 'Aberdeen titillates investors with its *juicy* coupon'
- (73) 'Cargill Taps into *Juicy* Glucosamine Deal'
- (74) 'The first CPDO deals yielded some 200 basis points, compressed index spreads have currently diminished return, making it more difficult to earn a triple-A rating at the *juicy* returns promised.'
- (75) 'Issued by Canadian companies in the energy or mining sectors to raise funds for exploration, flow-throughs give investors *juicy* tax breaks and the opportunity for capital appreciation based on new discoveries and rising commodity prices.'
- (76) 'Telecoms Are *Juicy* for Private-Equity Firms'
- (77) 'Inmarsat offers wider pricing, *juicy fees* to attract lenders hungry for leveraged assets'

The association between solid or liquid nourishing substances and taste acquires hyperbolic dimensions in ECONOMY = FOOD/ DRINK, as it is shown in samples (78) – (86) where the unpleasant taste is suggested by food turning sour:

- (78) 'She states that economic fears is hardly an auspicious time to strike out as the party's presidential nominee because elections that take place when the economy has turned *sour* historically have not gone well for the candidate representing the incumbent party.'
- (79) 'The investors' interest in Harrah's may turn *sour* because the credit quality of the deal was incorrectly priced.'
- (80) 'European Stocks Hit by *Sour* Mood'
- (81) 'Subsidy complaints could further *sour* WTO trade talks'
- (82) 'American Express to Take Big Charge as Loans *Sour*'
- (83) 'Numerous well-intentioned deals have gone *sour* due either to gross negligence or to small mistakes that add up to major problems.'
- (84) 'Sweet and *Sour* 2007 Deals'
- (85) 'Finance veteran leaves UBS as market *sours*'
- (86) 'Investors Turn *Sour* on Sotheby's'

Another conventionally powerful mappings interconnects markets with food, but it paradoxically lends the target a double identity on the one hand food, on the other hand man eater in the coinage 'cannibalisation' (MARKET = FOOD/ MAN EATER):

- (87) 'Under delayed differentiation the optimal policy is contingent on the observed demand realization and may lead to horizontal *cannibalization* and price dispersion for equal-quality products.'
- (88) 'According to the proposed model, moderate channel *cannibalization* can be a blessing in disguise if it decreases incentive intensity and lowers expected wage payments. Whether a larger volume of e-sales is blessing or curse depends (among other things) on the relative magnitude of *cannibalization* versus market enlargement and the degree to which the increase changes the composition of offline customers' types with respect to service costs.'

- (89) 'The company avoids possible *cannibalization* among stores'
 (90) 'Branded Generics' as a strategy to limit *cannibalization* of pharmaceutical markets.'

The MARKET = (MAN) EATER correspondence occurs in other contexts such as:

- (91) 'The recent *loss of appetite* of the market for IPOs of property vehicles may force a re-assessment of the more aggressive end of the market,' says Mr. Byrne.'
 (92) 'The Romanian sector is expected to continue a prolonged period of rapid expansion, fuelled by economic growth and in increasing *appetite* for more sophisticated banking services.'

The 'eater' slot is filled by money in the shape of taxes (TAXES = EATER) in:

- (93) 'In other words, fees and costs could *take a bite* of a third or more from a typical private investor property fund.'
 (94) 'But the more important question for investors is this: how much total return will be *eaten up* by this *termite* army of charges?'

The kitchen equipment that assists culinary procedures is metaphorically captured especially by the presence of the front/back burner on which several pots are cooked (INFLATION/ COMPANY = POT):

- (95) 'Putting inflation on the back burner'
 (96) 'Economy May Force Housing Legislation to *Back Burner*'
 (97) 'Reebok International Ltd. is understood to have narrowed its regional creative review to focus on Hong Kong for the present, putting four other markets on the *back-burner*.'
 (98) '*Wall Street's Capital 'Crisis' Moves to Back Burner*.'
 (99) 'It could be noted that the company has been on the *back burner* since 1998.'
 (100) 'Infrastructure Bonds on *Back Burner*'
 (101) 'Health Costs *Back Burner* Some Employers' Voluntary Benefits'
 (102) 'She says that she has no regrets for keeping her career on a *back burner* for 20 years as her family means more to her than her career.'
 (103) 'It has put plans for a second shop on the *back burner* for the time being while it continues to invest in its online presence.'
 (104) 'Buy-outs on *back burner* as Intersil funds growth'
 (105) 'Central European oil: merger on the *back burner*'
 (106) 'Trade is finally on *front burner*'
 (107) 'Strategic Oil Reserves Are on *Front Burner*'
 (108) 'Hot topics like enterprise content management and integration, search, collaboration, and e-learning will be on the *front-burner* for KMWorld & Intranets 2004'
 (109) 'ACC, APC put ad merging on *front burner*'

A variation of the pot metaphor is A COMPANY/ A MARKET = A PRESSURE COOKER, which insists on the pressure exerted by various forces within the respective target concepts:

- (110) 'The executives hope to generate enough interest for further meetings--and maybe even a check. It is a *pressure-cooker* environment that quickly separates entrepreneurs with a focused vision--and no fear of public speaking--from those that need a few more months polishing their elevator pitch.'

- (111) 'In recent years, many companies have become *pressure cookers*. Internal conflicts boil over when top management imposes broad changes in business practices-demanding a switch to a new companywide computer system, for example, or redrawing lines of authority, as in the case of the restructuring faced by the investment firm's sales force.'
- (112) 'Free Trade's *Pressure Cooker*'
- (113) 'But the speakers also agreed that the region is a "*pressure cooker*" for economic development that will be released when safety concerns are resolved.'

Alternatively, one of the typical representations of the market was found to be as a simmering dish (MARKET = SIMMERING DISH):

- (114) 'Private Market *Simmers* With \$2 Billion'
- (115) 'Economic, Income Issues *Simmer* Ahead of Philippine Election'
- (116) 'Sales of longtime favorites steadily *simmer*'

The mixture of various ingredients is conveyed by the term 'stew' which is mapped onto an economic and often political environment at a certain point in time (MARKET/ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT = STEW):

- (117) 'In a fourth-quarter earnings call last week, Qualcomm president Steve Altman stirred the *stew* of issues facing the company when he said the company's negotiating team doubts it can renew a cross-licensing agreement with Nokia Corp'
- (118) 'Tourism Australia in a *stew* over spoofs of 'bloody hell' ads.'
- (119) 'As the tort liability system has responded to societal and political demands over the years, it has become a mishmash of interrelated common law decisions, statutes, regulations and procedural rules that create a *stew* that may be nourishing, but does not look, smell or taste very appetizing. And like any other *stew*, it is probably best not to know what is in it. However, for a claims manager trying to ascertain the liability exposure of one defendant in a multi-party negligence claim, it is essential to ask about the *stew*, to sort out the relationships between these often contusing claims and defenses.'

Conventionalized metaphors have been sometimes the source of unexpected metaphorical extensions - the market dish may even experience a 'boiling point' in (120), while novel metaphors are also present (121):

- (120) '*Boiling point* for brokers'
- (121) '...and Romania had dallied with the idea of putting the auction *on ice*.'
- (AUCTION=DRINK)

Finally, let us signal two different coinages of the term 'lemon' in the business discourse; the first represents an attempt to coin lemon-dodge as a compound verb in (122), signalling the metaphor AN (overpriced) PRODUCT = A LEMON:

- (122) 'Since an underwriter sets an IPO's offer price without knowing its market value, investors can acquire information about its value and avoid overpriced deals ("*lemon-dodge*"). To mitigate this well-known risk, the bank enters into a repeat game with a coalition of investors who do not *lemon-dodge* in exchange for on-average underpriced shares.'

In (123) the very noun ‘*lemon*’ is used to correspond metaphorically to a low quality product:

(123) ‘In a famous economic article, George Akerlof (1970) showed that if a market is characterized by the product or service being of variable quality and buyers having difficulty in telling high quality products from low quality products, then ‘*lemons*’ (that is, duds, or products of inferior quality) may not only survive but begin to dominate this market.’ (Kay, N. 2007, Chapter 2, p.21)

While the systematicity of the metaphorical representations investigated herein is easily grasped, it is worth discussing why it was also claimed in the introduction to the article that they also display a high degree of homogeneity. They all seem to connect to a central concept, that of incorporation. Economic agents or entities conceptualized as food or drink constitute an intake for other economic entities or agents. There is therefore an overarching FEEDING metaphor (based on the activation of a feeding script) that motivates the various choices that writers make in terms of metaphorical correspondences. This large-scale feeding metaphor was previously claimed to support the aggressive FIGHTING metaphor often reported to dominate business discourses (Koller 2004).

In conclusion, it has to be granted that terms originating in the conceptual field of feeding and food are a rich source of metaphorical transfer into the domain of business and economics, their cognitive transposition being a natural propensity that brings about benefits and pitfalls in point of their explanatory and information-processing power, reconceptualization, textual structuring and attention focusing virtues as well as their ideological content.

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