

THE CONTRADICTIONARY MEANING OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN TIME OF CRISIS (THE BSE ISSUE): A BUSINESS OR A COMMUNITY?

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ABSTRACT. *This article presents a cognitive semantic analysis of the concept of the European Union, recreated in the press (The Times) in contradictory terms: sometimes seen as a business and some other times seen as a community, at the time of the BSE –Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy– crisis (March and May, 1996). This seems to be due to the framing of this institution through the use of different generative metaphors (Schön). Supplementing Schön’s ideas with Lakoff and Johnson’s framework, and following the line of research by some other scholars as Cubo de Severino, L., D. Israel and V. Zonana, it is claimed that the use of these metaphors is two-fold: describe a complex political reality and, in doing so, guide readers’ value judgement and expected behaviour according to the logic displayed by the use of those metaphors.*

KEYWORDS. *Generative and conceptual metaphors, problem setting, argumentative function of metaphors.*

RESUMEN. *Este artículo ofrece un análisis semántico-cognitivo del concepto de la Unión Europea, reflejado en la prensa (The Times) en términos contradictorios: visto como un negocio, en unas ocasiones, y como una comunidad, en otras, en el momento en que la enfermedad de las vacas locas (BSE) ocupa los titulares casi de forma diaria (marzo y mayo 1996). Esta contradicción parece deberse al hecho de que se presenta a una Unión Europea vista a través de los ojos de dos metáforas “generativas” diferentes (Schön). Apoyándonos además en la visión de Lakoff y Johnson y siguiendo la línea de investigación de estudiosos como Cubo de Severino, L., D. Israel y V. Zonana, se afirma que el uso de estas metáforas tiene dos aspectos: describir la compleja realidad política y guiar el juicio de valor y el modo de conducta esperado de los lectores, de acuerdo con la lógica de tales metáforas.*

PALABRAS CLAVE. *Metáforas generativas y conceptuales, planteamiento de problemas, función persuasiva de las metáforas.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Within the paradigm of cognitive semantics, the study of metaphor, as a basic cognitive device which allows us to deal with abstract domains of experience, has

become one of the subjects of inquiry in fields other than literature, such as psychology and linguistics. These disciplines are concerned with how what we say or what we are told affects how we come to think and reason about it and, consequently, act on it. The work carried out by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) has broadened the interest in metaphor to rethink both about the uses of the so-called dead metaphors –presenting them in a new light– and the other everyday uses of metaphor that help us structure and understand the complex reality we are surrounded by.

From this new perspective, metaphor is a mechanism that pervades our use of language to such an extent that it is very difficult to be aware of it unless we look at language with a fresh look; this is even more so in the case of dead metaphors due to the fact that they are so deeply rooted in our language system. Nevertheless, this new vision, which claims that metaphor plays a fundamental role when coming to terms with abstract concepts, is completely at odds with what has been the predominant view of metaphor until the eighties. This can be shown by just looking at one of the comments made by a leading figure of the antiquity, Aristotle, whose suspicion of metaphor seems to have permeated up to the 20th century. He says, when speaking of scientific language: “if we are to avoid arguing in metaphors, clearly we must also avoid defining in metaphors and defining metaphorical terms” (in the translation of Aristotle 1966: 241). Or more recently the words by Locke seem not only to confirm the suspicious nature of metaphor but even evoke a more insidious nature of this phenomenon, as can be shown in the following comment:

[...]If we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides orders and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement, and so indeed are the perfect cheat; and therefore however laudable or allowable oratory may render them in harangues and popular addresses, they are certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided and, where truth and knowledge are concerned, cannot but be thought a great fault either of the language or person that makes use of them. (Locke 1961: 105)

However, having metaphors removed from every discourse, as suggested by the two philosophers, is something considered impossible at this stage when so much work has been done to demonstrate how the use of metaphor is present even in our daily use of language. Therefore, the only plausible way to follow seems to be to keep exploring the links between metaphor and language in the different realms of our experience.

In this paper, I would like to contribute to the cultural understanding of the debate that followed the beef crisis and, particularly, the way it was handled by the European Union as the role played by this institution –and how this institution was conceptualised– was at the very centre of the discussion. The study will proceed by analysing, from a cognitive perspective, the rhetoric used to report on this socio-economic issue in the media discourse, as reflected in the newspaper *The Times*. The period of study will begin

on the 22nd of March (1996) –the day after the British government admitted that some people may have been infected with Mad Cow disease–and end on the 31st of May (1996). Only articles that clearly dealt with the beef crisis were selected.

The hypothesis guiding this paper is that in the articles under study we will find examples that fit two conflicting frames: the EU seen as a business and the EU as a community. The analysis, which examines these two scenarios, will be divided in three different stages corresponding to the use of the different metaphors. In the first stage, the metaphor that seems to exert a stronger influence is **THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A BUSINESS** –the name of each metaphor will be given in capitals to differentiate it from everything else–; the second stage represents an attempt to picture the situation in a new light **THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A COMMUNITY**; the third and final stage represents a move back to the beginning as the staging of the previous metaphor did not prove to be successful. In the process of covering each stage, some examples will be picked out to show how each argument applies in the newspaper. For this study, I shall draw on a publication by Batstone (2000), as she uses the same two metaphors to analyse the concept of university –university seen as a business or as a community; Lakoff and Johnson’s discussion of conceptual metaphors, instantiated as mappings between a source and a target domain; and, finally, Schön’s theory of generative metaphors (1993).

Schön (1993) posits, firstly, that how we frame a problem depends on the metaphors that we build on; and, secondly, that the possible solutions to the problem will always be consistent with the frame used. Then, what Schön suggests is that, in social policy, we should look more into problem setting than into problem solving as the second is strictly determined by the first; in other words, the problem solving strategies to a given problem will be influenced by the logic of the metaphor readers have been exposed to (Boers 1997). Thus, I argue that the two metaphors **THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A BUSINESS** and **THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A COMMUNITY** are the result of imposing different frames over the same situation, as said above, which, in turn, give way to different solutions.

When we become attentive to the framing of social problems we thereby become aware of conflicting frames. Our debates over social policy turn often not on problems but on dilemmas. The participants in the debate bring different and conflicting frames, generated by different and conflicting metaphors. (Schön 1993: 139)

Nevertheless, my interest in this study is not just to see what metaphors are used in the political arena, but also for what political purposes they are created and, when necessary, changed to suit the emerging needs. As Cubo de Severino et al. (1988) posit metaphors have two very important functions –the second is the function I am highlighting here: a) to give a more concrete representation of the situation at hand, making it clearer (heuristic function); b) to manipulate readers’ minds through the inference patterns and value judgements generated by metaphors (argumentative function).

2. FIRST STAGE: THE EUROPEAN UNION IS A BUSINESS

If we look up the definition of ‘business’ offered by the *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* (1992), one of the entries says: “an organisation which produces and sells goods or provides a service”. In the present context, this means that the EU is viewed as an institution where co-operation is not felt to be as its main goal, but rather it focuses on transactions or business deals.

In the issue at hand, let us remember that the conflict happens at a time when the EU is in the process of trying to achieve a greater co-operation and unification –through the projects to create a single currency, launched in January 2002, and the Europol, the division of a unified police force, for example. At any rate, this willingness to co-operate to attain a compact Europe (a *Leviathan*, in Hobbes’ terminology) seems to be completely disrupted by the conflict of the Mad Cow Disease as there will be attempts to approach the situation by imposing different frames depending on how the problem is perceived and presented.

Up till now I have been talking about how the problem is presented to readers, but at this point it is interesting to raise the following question: what exactly is the problem being pointed to? Referring to Schön’s idea that problem setting is framed by metaphor, it is curious to note that although we find phrases such as “the problem” or “the crisis” very frequently never do we find in the articles explicit reference to what the problem really is and it is the reader’s job to infer it by looking at the solutions given to it (Batstone 2000).

The first solution given to “the problem”, as reflected in the newspaper *The Times*, is to frame the situation under a metaphor in which the European Union is seen as a business, where each nation is trying to protect its own interests by closing its frontiers and, thus, avoid the entrance of infected British beef within its boundaries. At the heart of this metaphor lie two other metaphors: a) THE NATION IS A PERSON, where the nation is considered as a person that engages in social and economic relations with its partners: the other national states. Its body is the landmass which is within its frontiers. This metaphor is what permits us to talk about Spain, for instance, as a country that has decided to close its frontiers for a purpose, which takes us to the second metaphor; b) RATIONALITY IS THE MAXIMIZATION OF SELF-INTEREST (Lakoff 1991). Since it is in the interest of every member nation to be as healthy as possible, it follows from here that each nation will seek to maximise its own interests. In the case of Great Britain, the objective is to have the frontiers removed so that the controlled beef can be exported to other countries and resume an activity which is very profitable for them. On the other hand, the interest for the other member states is to avoid having its own cattle infected by ring-fencing the problem within Great Britain.

- (1) Claude Allo of the French National Cattle Federation said: “The English are in danger of exporting to us the problem they have already stirred up in English public opinion. There is only one thing to be done, stop the imports as a matter of urgency.” (T/22/March)

- (2) Cattle farmers are facing a bleak future with consumer confidence in beef plummeting and foreign countries imposing bans to keep out what is seen as an irretrievably contaminated product. (T/23/March)

This crisis clearly demonstrates the flaws of a union which still has a long way to go before all the countries are willing to pull together for the sake of the whole Union in moments of crisis. In spite of the fact that solidarity is claimed to be one of the main assets of the Union, the two examples demonstrate how readily countries tend to close off their frontiers. Examples:

- (3) Instead of pulling together as dictated by the solidarity preached in all the continental euro-rhetoric, the moment the word was out on CJD, the national drawbridges were slammed shut to British beef. (T/28/March)
- (4) All those frontiers that were supposed to disappear suddenly sprung back and everyone tried to extract a bit of profit for himself out of this crisis. (T/28/March)

The reasons that might support this kind of attitude, even though it is very much denounced by Great Britain, is that there is not yet a fixed mechanism to come to terms with situations like these when they arise. Nevertheless, in spite of the metaphor shaping the situation, there seems to be some indication that a degree of team spirit has permeated the members of the Union since they are willing to co-operate at least financially with this member of the Union (Great Britain) when it badly needs them.

- (5) President Chirac set the tone yesterday to support Britain in its hour of need and to give generously when compensating British farmers. (T/28/March)
- (6) Europe's leaders will reassure John Major today that he can count on their largesse to soften the financial blow of Britain's beef disaster. (T/29/March)

The team spirit which runs in this sentence is then reinforced through the use of another argument expressed by Herr Köhl, another European leader, which can be seen as a step towards the use of the next metaphor (EU AS A COMMUNITY) as is shown in the following example:

- (7) Herr Köhl recalled that Europe had helped Germany out when it had suffered an outbreak of swine fever, so it was normal to help Mr Major. (T/30/March)

3. SECOND STAGE: THE EUROPEAN UNION IS A COMMUNITY

Under the lexical form 'community', one of the entries given in the Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary (1992) is "a particular group of countries who have all agreed to work together or help each other." That is to say, the reason that lies

behind the coming together of a group of nations is the mutual advantage expected from the co-operation of their members. The concept of “community” is, thus, more help-oriented.

In this second stage, after the instinctive feeling of self-protection of the first few days seen in the closing of barriers, the situation is framed under the disguise of a new metaphor. This strategy was an attempt by some leaders of the Union to change the scenario by offering a new solution to “the problem” and, thus, bring about a different response on the part of the readers. Chirac, one of the European leaders who was close to Great Britain and at that time was trying to forge an intense and tripartite relationship in the heart of Europe between Great Britain, Germany and France, looked at the issue differently giving way to a more cold-headed and ideological approach to the problem.

- (8) Asked whether Europe could spare the 25 billion pounds estimated to be earmarked for the crisis, Mr Chirac said: When the house is in flames, you don't save the water for washing in. You use it to put out the fire. (T/30/March)

If we look in detail at the new frame invoked and compare it with the previous one, the striking difference is the way in which the part/whole schema (Lakoff 1987) should be understood (Cubo de Severino, et al. 1988)). Going back to the previous stage, the act of having different countries closing unilaterally their borders presupposes that each nation can still be seen as a whole, not dependent on anybody else and so able to take its own decisions and act accordingly. The fact that this schema has been validated through use by the members of the Union makes it now difficult to be changed.

On the other hand, Chirac, through the use of the new metaphor, is trying to generate a completely different scenario and a different behaviour on the part of the citizens of the new whole. In his frame, the whole does not correspond to the nation any longer, but to the European Union; the parts, in turn, will be composed of the different national countries seen now as regions of that new whole. At any rate, as the attempt to modify the part/whole schema is anything but easy, politicians, as Chirac, are well aware that some persuasion will be needed in order to make the deconstruction of the schema effective. The resource adopted is to assign a positive value judgement to the new picture of the schema because of the sense of completeness and cohesion it provides to the new whole, the Union. By contrast to that a negative value is given to having the individual parts isolated, as the function designed to perform by the whole cannot be achieved. In this line of reasoning, the house in flames which Chirac mentions, corresponding to the whole, is given a positive value judgement, in contrast to the value assigned to each of the individual rooms –the different nations– as each room in itself does not make a house, or the absence of one of them makes the house incomplete, lacking in something. Building on that value judgement, the point that Chirac makes is felt to be natural and very logical. If there is a fire, all the water in the house –the money in the coffers of the EU– must be used for what is felt to be a priority, which is saving the house from burning

–saving the EU from Mad Cow Disease– instead of using part of the water for washing in –for financing any other projects within the EU which are not regarded indispensable.

In the new frame, the inference patterns that arise make readers value positively a unified whole as there are more chances to deal with the situation successfully; thus, all the situations which prevent the whole from working as such, as the act of having the different states closing their frontiers, are valued negatively. With this in mind, if nations try to fight the situation independently they will not be as powerful and effective and they will not benefit from the strength of the Union. This argument is reinforced by the very same image of the metaphor chosen: that of a house, the place where, typically, the members of a family live. The idea of a family seems to fit perfectly well with the argumentative function of this metaphor, which is: if we are all members of the same family –seen as a typically supportive structure– we should pull together and be ready to make sacrifices without caring much about how much strength and energy –money– is needed to overcome the problem. We have seen how the experiential logic of the source domain –a house– is then preserved in the mapping onto the target domain –the European Union– through the projection of its inference patterns and value judgements, as claimed by the Invariance Hypothesis (Lakoff 1990).

The same idea that the beef crisis should be considered as Europe’s own and put up with by the whole of the Union instead of having the individual nations walking out of this institution is stated repeatedly in the newspaper *The Times*.

- (9) Britain’s beef crisis was embraced as Europe’s own yesterday when EU leaders gave John Major unexpectedly warm support. (T/30/March)
- (10) Lamberto Dini, the Italian Prime Minister, who chaired the summit said that Europe would act together to help restore confidence in the market. “It is a European problem. All European markets are suffering. We have to work to re-establish equilibrium. (T/30/March)

In the process to achieve a unified Europe, there are member states that are more reluctant to the integration in some areas and have been fighting to keep part of their independence. For instance, all the countries that make up the European Union, except Great Britain, accepted to have a common currency, the Euro, and unified their efforts until the new currency was launched in January 2002 in all those European countries alike. Great Britain, on the other hand, has managed to be part of the Union while retaining its own currency: the Pound. Having Great Britain not fully involved in the process is also negatively valued as is demonstrated by the image of isolation that it received in the press due to its unfriendly approach to Europe.

- (11) The beef crisis has altered the chemistry among the leaders as they gather. The quarantine has given physical form to Britain’s stark political isolation from most of the other 14 states on Europe’s future. (T/29/March)

- (12) Although Britain is the most isolated member as Europe starts renegotiating elements of the Maastricht treaty, other leaders also have conflicting positions (T/29/March)

As a consequence, the European leaders ask Britain for a more Euro-friendly attitude since in moments of crisis the hand that will bail it out will come from Europe. This crisis is, thus, a good excuse to show the future members of this Union and particularly the citizens of Great Britain that, even though this Union is not well established yet, it will bring about benefits not just in the long-term but in the short-term as well.

- (13) At the same time, in the view of many EU officials, the beef crisis has made Britain beholden to the EU and demonstrated the worth of solidarity among members. (T/29/March)
- (14) Hervé de Charette, the French Foreign Minister, said: “The British see that the idea of solidarity –something they often oppose– has its benefits. (T/30/March)

Nevertheless, the use of this metaphor tries to influence not just the minds of British citizens but mainly hopes to guide the behaviour of European citizens through the inference patterns which result from applying this metaphor; it leads them, unless they question the validity of such a frame, to give generously towards something which is felt to be a common goal: the welfare of the whole Union, as can be seen in the following examples:

- (15) Europe’s leaders will reassure John Major today that he can count on their largesse to soften the financial blow of Britain’s beef disaster but in meeting to launch the Maastricht review conference they will also make clear that they expect a more Euro-friendly approach from London. (T/29/March)

At any rate, though the frame being used in this second stage to conceptualise the situation is different, since the EU is presented as a community instead of as a business, it is a metaphor with a solid economic foundation because the main benefit derived from belonging to this community is the financial help which Great Britain will obtain.

4. THIRD STAGE: THE EUROPEAN UNION IS A BUSINESS

The background information to this new stage is the refusal to lift the ban on British beef given by the Veterinary Committee of the European Union on the 1st of May (1996). To the eyes of the British government this piece of news came as a nasty surprise since the use of the family scenario by some of the European leaders possibly led the British government to expect different treatment from its continental partners. In spite of that, the family scenario evoked was not strong enough to persuade the members of the

Veterinary Committee to change their decision, which gave rise to an intense feeling of frustration among the members of the British government.

This stage is a jump back to the first stage. Nevertheless, the initiative to hold onto this frame is now taken by Great Britain when on hearing that the ban was not lifted decided to invoke the same set of metaphors discussed in the first stage. The main difference, though, between the first and third stages is that the first use of this general metaphor –THE EU SEEN AS A BUSINESS– was more on the side of an instinctive reaction of self-protection, as mentioned above, whereas this second use seems to be a more reasoned choice to try to anticipate and then guide the annoyance felt by British people. Yet, in this stage, a new metaphor was exploited –THE TRANSACTION METAPHOR, which elaborates the scenario further– to channel the desperate feelings of British readers and, thus, manipulate their expected behaviour.

Those metaphors already discussed in the first stage, which still apply here, are: THE NATION IS A PERSON and RATIONALITY IS THE MAXIMIZATION OF SELF-INTEREST, so Great Britain, considered as a person, is seen behaving in a very rational manner when trying to maximise its own interests. Given the fact that the ban was not lifted and the EU was not considered to be very helpful to them, Great Britain decided to walk out of the European Union seeking to maximise its self-interest, which could be summarised as follows:

a) Show the EU that Great Britain is a powerful country, and as a consequence such attitude towards it is unbearable.

(16) Britain is being pushed around and I am not having the country treated like this.

(T/22/May)

The imagery of sports portrayed in this sentence conveys well the idea of confrontation between the two parties –Great Britain and Europe–. Besides, another point implicitly made is that the attitude of the European Union should be different depending on how powerful the member nation is.

b) Show the British people that their leaders will speak up if their interests are damaged.

(17) With Conservative MPs baying for action, he was well aware that the failure of veterinary experts to lift even partially the ban on beef on Monday night would be seen as yet another kick in the teeth. (22/May)

In this comment, we can see through the image of a kick in the teeth a clear indication of abuse by the EU. Even more so, this feeling of abuse is heightened by the fact that this kick has even been repeated, placing a beef ban first and then not wanting to lift it. The prevalence of examples instantiating this metaphor seems to show that Great Britain's move –their decision to freeze relations with the EU– is mainly aimed at

the very British people, making a show of courage and self-determination to preserve their interests.

- (18) Yesterday John Major told the Newspaper Society: “As Prime Minister, I must speak for the national interest as I see it.” (T/2/May)
- (19) I regard such action –Europe’s refusal to ease its beef ban– as a wilful disregard of Britain’s interests and, in some cases, a breach of faith. I cannot tolerate these interests being brushed aside by some of our European partners with no reasonable grounds to do so. (T/22/May)
- (20) Downing Street sources declined to see Mr Major’s announcement as a retaliatory action and said it was not being done out of bloody-mindedness but to defend the national interest. (T/22/May)

The other metaphor applied to the situation was THE TRANSACTION METAPHOR –we shall do something only if we get something back–. In this situation, only if the EU eases the beef ban will Great Britain co-operate with the EU to achieve a satisfactory outcome for both. Nevertheless, since Europe refused to help Britain to lift the beef ban, Britain threatened to block all important progress in the European Union by not co-operating with EU decisions.

- (21) Mr Major went on to say that he was acting with reluctance, but he saw no alternative. “The European Union operates through goodwill. If we do not benefit from goodwill from partners clearly we cannot reciprocate. (T/22/May/96)

The use of this domain is a step back into the business metaphor as the participants involved in a transaction only look for the mutual benefit in the short-term but as soon as they realise it is not profitable, they will stop the business. This scenario is very different from the kind of behaviour one would expect from a family member where convenience and profit-making are just out of the question. Besides, the conceptualisation of the part/whole schema is shifted again, as the whole in this conception corresponds once again to the nation, Great Britain, who is fighting to keep its strength and economic vitality.

If we accept that those two different scenarios exist and that they are based on different metaphors, then I will be on safe ground to say that the use of those two metaphors is an attempt both to define the situation, thus making it more accessible to readers by providing in the process a solution to “the problem” (heuristic function) and, at the same time, to condition readers’ beliefs with the hope of modifying their interpretation of it (argumentative function). In both of these functions, one of the hidden aspects of metaphor is that it is designed to unify the diverse feelings of a whole nation around a common ground.

5. CONCLUSION

I hope to have demonstrated that the concept of the European Union is best captured through an analysis based on a cognitive approach. For the analysis I have examined all the lexical expressions related to this concept found in the period of study, which implies that the meaning of the EU is, then, arrived at rather than taken as a given. Understanding a concept from this perspective allows us to have a better insight of its complex nature, in contrast to approaches such as Componential Analysis where meaning is presented as something fixed. Thus, the analysis carried out in this paper tries to show that the meaning of a concept is not something static but rather dynamic, which changes, in this case shifting from the business to the community scenario, depending on the metaphor being imposed. This takes us into the second part of this section.

The other benefit this study is expected to bring is to see how the whole issue has been construed through the use of metaphors, shaping readers' political reality and, as a consequence, their future decisions and actions, which demonstrates how effective, ideologically speaking, the use of metaphors can be as instruments which create and recreate new scenarios depending on the political needs of the moment.

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