

How are metaphors used in negotiation? A communication context analysis

Elena Poliakova ¹, Frieder Lempp ¹ , & Leigh Anne Liu ² 

¹ Department of International Negotiation and Conflict Management, IESEG School of Management, France
² Robinson College of Business, Georgia State University, U.S.A.

Keywords

Negotiation, Communication, Metaphor, Mental models, Interview data, Thematic analysis

Correspondence

Frieder Lempp, IESEG School of Management, 1 Parvis de La Défense, 92044 Paris La Défense cedex, France.
Email: f.lempp@ieseg.fr

doi.org/10.34891/we3z-eg67

Abstract

This study explores how metaphors can be used in negotiation to convey meaning and understanding about abstract concepts. The authors identify and synthesize the experiences of practicing negotiators and provide practical recommendations regarding the use of metaphors before, during, and after a negotiation. Data was collected from 20 practicing negotiators by way of semi-structured interviews, transcribed and analyzed by way of a thematic analysis. Adair et al.'s (2016, 2024) model of contextual dimensions of communication acted as a coding framework. A thematic analysis of interview data complements the existing literature on metaphors and negotiation. The findings confirm that negotiators use metaphors before, during, and after negotiations. The predominant use of metaphors occurs in a contextual relationship or spatial dimension of communication as opposed to a message, or time context. Further, there are various positive effects of using metaphors in negotiations: facilitating communication, positively influencing the emotional environment, and acting as helpful mental models in the preparation and follow-up of negotiation meetings. The principal practical take-aways for negotiators from our study are: 1) When negotiating, it is generally beneficial for the process and outcome of the negotiation to use metaphors; 2) To improve the strategic use of metaphors in negotiation, it is useful to critically reflect on the types, origins, and uses of one's own metaphors; 3) Metaphors are useful for summarizing and integrating information in the context of negotiation; 4) Metaphoric language can be used to improve the atmosphere in a negotiation meeting or to get across a difficult point.

Volume 18, Number 1, Pages 69-93

© 2025 International Association for Conflict Management

Journalists often use metaphors to describe real-life negotiations to make them more easily understandable and relatable. For example, the negotiations about the United Kingdom's (UK's) exit from the European Union (EU) were frequently characterized as a divorce emphasizing the complexity of disentangling the UK from EU regulations, agreements, and institutions. Trade negotiations, such as those within the World Trade Organization, have been compared to a tug of war between competing interests, stressing the competing demands of different nations and industries with each side trying to pull the outcome in their favor. When companies engage in merger and acquisition negotiations, the process is often compared to a courtship or dating. This metaphor highlights the stages of building a relationship from initial interest to final commitment. Negotiation trainers, coaches, and negotiators themselves regularly use metaphorical language to characterize their actions, tactics, and strategies. For example, in an article published in Harvard Business Review, Leary *et al.* (2013) stated that while some people "boil over" in negotiations, others "freeze up", that if you inadvertently "get under a counterpart's skin", talks can go "off the rails", and that negotiation is simply a matter of "cool calculation". These examples show how metaphors can be used to convey meaning and understanding about abstract concepts, which are

ubiquitous in negotiation.

The value of studying metaphors lies in their ability to integrate, shape, and structure information (Hartel & Savolainen, 2016; Ziemkiewicz & Kosara, 2008) as well as in the influence they can have on people's cognition, emotions, and perceptions, in particular perceptions of relationships (Deetz & Mumby, 1985). In a negotiation context, metaphors, such as the metaphor of a battle or the metaphor of a dance, can strongly influence how negotiators think and feel about the negotiation, how they approach the negotiation, how they perceive their counterparts, or how they behave during the negotiation (Cohen, 2003; Docherty, 2004; Gelfand & McCusker, 2017; Smith, 2005). While previous studies have investigated the use of metaphors in negotiation, the evidence remains inconclusive as to what role metaphors play for negotiators and what effect they have on negotiators' choice of strategy.

Our explorative interview study aims to continue this line of research by investigating how practicing negotiators with international work experience use metaphors to make sense of negotiation situations. In particular, we provide new insights by presenting novel empirical evidence and, thus, enhance the understanding of the role of metaphors in negotiation beyond existing findings. To evaluate the collected interview data, we draw on Adair *et al.*'s (2016, 2024) model of contextual dimensions of communication which posits that people have different predispositions towards the message, relationship, temporal, or spatial context of a communication. We argue that these predispositions are reflected by the metaphors our interviewees use to characterize negotiation.

Considering the views of practicing international negotiators, our study offers three extensions to the research agenda. Firstly, the study brings to the surface the experiences of practicing negotiators in relation to the use of metaphors in negotiation situations. Thus, it serves as a pilot for future experimental research and inspires the selection of specific metaphors or experimental variables for further investigations, for instance, on the impact of metaphors on the quality of communication or the emotional environment in the context of negotiation. Secondly, the study provides managerial recommendations that are informed by the experiences of professional negotiators regarding the use and potential reshaping of metaphors with a view to improving both the process and outcome of negotiations. A third contribution of our study lies in its international dimension. Since communication, consensus building, and cooperation are more complex in intercultural than in intracultural contexts (e.g., Adair & Brett, 2005; Liu, Chua, & Stahl, 2010), it is particularly valuable to study the experiences of negotiators who have been exposed to different cultures – an experience that is becoming increasingly common nowadays. The international dimension of our study allows us to explore diverse negotiation situations and metaphors used to characterize them which are not tied to a single national culture. More specifically, our study explores the following two research questions:

RQ1. Which types of metaphors do professional international negotiators use to characterize a negotiation process?

RQ1. How do these metaphors influence the experience of professional negotiators?

In addressing these research questions and for the purpose of this study, we take a static view of metaphors in that we consider them stable during the process of a negotiation and assume that metaphors influence the whole experience of negotiation. Further, we are not claiming to make any statements about a cause-effect relationship between metaphors and negotiators' experiences. Rather, our aim is to better understand, in an exploratory sense, what types of metaphors are used by international negotiators and how those metaphors influence the experiences of those negotiators.

Literature Review

In the following, we first review the management literature on studies on the occurrence, role, and use of metaphors in the context of business. In particular, we present Lakoff's (1993) theory of metaphor as a theoretical background for our study. Second, we review the negotiation literature with a focus on identifying empirical studies on metaphors in relation to negotiation. Third, we introduce Adair *et al.*'s (2016, 2024) theory of contextual dimensions of communication. Adair *et al.*'s work provides the analytical framework for coding our interview data and for interpreting and evaluating the patterns emerging from the data.

Metaphors in management research

In classical theories of language, metaphor is defined as “a novel or poetic linguistic expression where one or more words for a concept are used outside of its normal conventional meaning to express a similar concept” (Lakoff, 1993, p. 1). However, as Lakoff points out, a metaphor is not only a figure of speech, but also a mode of thought which helps humans to make sense of abstract concepts (Lakoff, 1993). Abstract concepts are compared with concrete concepts to facilitate understanding. For example, as Lakoff illustrates, a love relationship (abstract) may be metaphorically referred to as a journey (concrete), as in “our relationship has hit a dead-end street” or “we may have to go our separate ways”. Business research has mainly looked at metaphors as a basis for understanding (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000). According to Moran (1989), “the use of metaphor implies a way of thinking and a way of seeing”. Following this characterization of metaphors as ways of thinking, in their review paper on metaphors in organizational research, Cornelissen *et al.* (2008) distinguish between a contextual and de-contextual approach to the use of metaphors. The contextual approach interprets metaphors as figures of speech in a narrow context. The de-contextual, cognitive approach envisions metaphors as a tool to organize thought and experience, in line with Lakoff's conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

For this study, we follow Lakoff (1993) by differentiating between the linguistic and conceptual dimension of a metaphor. Further, we adopt Cornelissen *et al.*'s (2008) de-contextual approach in that we do not focus on specific metaphors used in negotiation transcripts but, instead, investigate how metaphors are used by negotiators to reflect and organize their thoughts and experiences.

Management scholars have also conducted empirical studies on the use of metaphors in business. Morris *et al.* (2007) looked at two types of metaphors in stock market commentary. Agent metaphors characterize price change as a volitional action (i.e., “the Dow fought its way upward”) whereas object metaphors portray them as movements of inanimate objects (“the Dow fell through a resistance level”). They found that agent metaphors appeared more frequently when the trend was steady and had a positive direction. Cornelissen *et al.* (2011) investigated the role of metaphor and analogy in the framing and legitimization of strategic change. They found that metaphors are more effective in the context of substitutive change, as opposed to additive change, and that the effectiveness of metaphors in the framing of change depends on the degree of their cultural familiarity to stakeholders as well as their relationship with prior motivation of stakeholders. Tourish and Hargie's (2012) in-depth interview study explored the role of root metaphors used by banking CEOs to explain the 2008 banking crisis. The metaphors used showed the bankers' desire to diminish their responsibility and inefficiency regarding the framing of public debate. Landau *et*

al. (2015) investigated the divergent effects of pictorial metaphors in company logos on observers. Liu *et al.*'s (2015) study demonstrates how metaphoric language reflects the way newly formed international joint ventures (IJVs) are managed, and how variations in performance related to IJV control complexity. Two types of relational metaphors, patriarchal family and modern marriage, were found to be used to characterize IJVs. Semantic fit or misfit moderated by asymmetrical or symmetrical equity structure affected the achievement of strategic goals and the quality of relationship in IJVs. Kuckertz (2019) investigated the role of the biological metaphor of entrepreneurial ecosystems in the academic discourse on entrepreneurial research and practice. Most recently, Chin *et al.* (2021) explored a sea-like heuristic metaphor to uncover a complex knowledge-creating mechanism in the modern digital context of cross-cultural business models and suggested that metaphor can be used as a lens to analyze such complex phenomena.

Metaphors in negotiation research

Research on metaphors in negotiation has primarily focused on cultural differences in the use of metaphoric language in negotiations (e.g., Chmielecki, 2013; Schlie & Young, 2008; Smith, 2005, 2009), linguistic differences in the use of metaphors (e.g., Cohen, 2000, 2001a, 2001b), the impact of metaphoric language on the quality of communication in negotiation (Liu *et al.*, 2010), the role of metaphors for the conduct of negotiation processes (e.g., Smith, 2005, 2009), and the role of specific metaphors, such as dance, war, game, etc. in the context of international negotiations (e.g., Hall & Hall, 1976; Spector, 1996).

Hall and Hall (1976) use the metaphor of dance to illustrate the universality of negotiation as a phenomenon, yet the rhythms and movements are specific to the culture of the negotiators. Faure (1998) found that Chinese subjects prefer different metaphors when negotiating with domestic and foreign negotiators, and the choice of metaphor affects their strategy. A metaphor “mobile welfare” is used to describe a negotiation with foreigners reflecting a competitive attitude and resulting in tactics such as making false concessions, frightening the opponent, making the opponent feel guilty, or wearing down the opponent psychologically and physically. A different metaphor, “joint quest,” is applied when a partner is from China or a foreigner familiar with Chinese culture. This metaphor implies cooperative tactics, including politeness, indirect communication, and rituals. Chmielecki (2013) compared the types of metaphors used by Polish, British, American, and Chinese negotiators. He found support for the hypothesis that Polish negotiators define and understand negotiations more similar to British and American negotiators than to Chinese negotiators. Cohen (2000, 2001a, 2001b) looked at metaphors typical of specific cultures to characterize negotiations. The analysis of negotiations in English-speaking cultures showed that negotiation is envisioned as an activity. Negotiations in the US and the UK are characterized by non-violent tactics and effective and fair conflict resolution. Key metaphors of conflict in Costa-Rican Spanish were, instead, related to heat, feeling lost or trapped, and being ingrained in a network of people. The word “enredo”, one of the names of conflict, stems from a “fishermen’s net” and reflects how conflicts are spread in close communities based on extended family relationships. According to Cohen (2001a), the four dominant themes of metaphors in the English language are industrial relations, engineering, Christian theology, and sports and games. Many industrial metaphors are related to labor-management disputes, which presuppose that negotiations follow set rules and, as a result, are non-violent, fair and represent the opinion of low-power participants. Engineering metaphors depict negotiations as processes in which every problem can be solved through a rational analysis. The “good faith” metaphor and its sub-themes stem from

Christian theology and emphasize such values as honesty and commitment to a resolution of a conflict. Sports metaphors emphasize the idea of fairness. In their review, Imai and Gelfand (2009) showed how negotiation metaphors in Arabic and Hebrew are different from those in British and American English. In the Arabic culture, negotiations are closely linked to the concepts of honor, dignity, reputation, and face. Clan rivalry is common and even minor disputes can evolve into matters of honor. In Hebrew, the source of metaphors in negotiation are the Torah, Judaism, and Jewish law. Negotiation is envisioned as an ongoing intellectual duel which can never be totally resolved (Cohen, 2000).

More recently, Gelfand and McCusker (2017) looked at the relationship between negotiation and culture through the lens of metaphor and characterized metaphor as both a theoretical perspective that can connect research on culture and negotiation and a practical approach to manage negotiation. Meunier and Morin (2016) found that most metaphors in bilateral trade and investment negotiations are mechanical metaphors (e.g., “building blocks”, “stumbling stones”) and are not just figures of speech, but also patterns of thinking. Ippolito and Adler (2018) explored if and how the musical ensemble metaphor can make a mindset more settlement-oriented and affect conflict outcomes. Marmol Queralto (2021) analyzed metaphors surrounding the Brexit negotiations in general, and the status of Gibraltar in particular.

Since metaphors are abstract concepts that help individuals make sense of information, the findings of studies which apply construal level theory in negotiation research can also shed light on potential effects of metaphors on negotiation processes and outcomes. Construal level theory (CLT) proposes that for various reasons people form abstract mental representations of psychologically distant objects (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Thus, CLT assumes varying levels of mental representations: high-level construals, which are abstract and conserve the essential, invariant properties of the referent object, and lower-level representations, which are more concrete and detailed. Research on the role of construal levels in negotiation has consistently shown that negotiators who construed issues abstractly rather than concretely reached better agreements and gained higher profits (Giacomantonio, De Dreu, & Mannetti, 2010; Henderson, Trope, & Carnevale, 2006; Henderson & Trope, 2009; Wening, Keith, & Abele, 2016). To be more specific, having negotiators think abstractly rather than concretely about issues increased negotiators’ logrolling (Henderson, Trope, & Carnevale, 2006), propensity to discover integrative agreements (Henderson & Trope, 2009), ability to revise their faulty fixed-pie perceptions, accept offers based on the underlying interests representations, reporting of higher cooperative problem-solving (Giacomantonio, De Dreu, & Mannetti, 2010), and focus more on interests and the exchange of information (Wening, Keith & Abele, 2016). Abstract versus concrete thinking can also promote the prospects of peace in contexts of intergroup conflict resolution (Halevy & Berson, 2022). Therefore, CLT would suggest that if metaphors are of high-level construal, they should facilitate information processing and increase the likelihood of integrative agreements.

To conclude, our literature review has shown that the most common research topic is the use of metaphors by negotiators in specific cultures. To our knowledge, there is no published interview study that seeks to directly investigate the views of practicing international negotiators on the types, origins, uses, perceptions, and effects of metaphors in negotiation. Our study aims at filling this gap. In doing so we follow a constructivist approach to culture, according to which culture influences individual cognition and behavior by activating knowledge structures via cultural, motivational, and contextual cues (e.g., Hong *et al.*, 2000; Morris and Fu, 2001). We explore the experiences of negotiators who have been exposed to different cultures throughout their careers. To analyze our data and make sense of these diverse international experiences we chose the theory

of communication contexts (Adair *et al.*, 2016, 2024). Since communication is essential in negotiation, this framework is most suitable to analyze negotiators' perceptions and experiences.

Contextual dimensions of communication

The theory of communication contexts goes back to Hall's (1973) distinction between high and low context communication cultures. Representatives of high context cultures rely less on explicit verbal messages and pay more attention to implicit communication, whereas individuals from low context cultures disregard contextual cues in communication and social interaction (Adair *et al.*, 2016, 2024). The theory of communication contexts was further developed and adapted to an individual level by Adair *et al.* (2016, 2024) who proposed four contextual dimensions of communication: the message, relational, temporal, and spatial context. These four dimensions were chosen to fully understand communication contexts and reflect both the content and form of the message conveyed (Adair, 2016), since, according to Hall (1966, 1973, 1989; Hall & Hall, 1990) attitudes to interpersonal relationships, space, and time can capture the influence of culture on communication. Since communication is essential in negotiation, this framework is most suitable for our analysis. The message context is defined as "the cues that convey implied and inferred meaning accompanying a verbal message in communication" (Adair *et al.*, 2016, p. 200). Direct or explicit communicators use predominantly verbal messages, while indirect or implicit communicators rely on nonverbal cues which contain crucial information (Adair *et al.*, 2016; Triandis *et al.*, 1968). The relationship context is defined as "the cues relating to the meaning associated with the nature of a relationship between two interlocutors" (Adair *et al.*, 2016, p. 201) and shows the importance of personal relationships for communicators (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2011). This context also captures the role of face-saving and relationship-maintaining for the communicators (Adair *et al.*, 2016). The temporal context, or communicators' attitude to time, captures variations in temporal focus, pace of life, and time horizons (Adair *et al.*, 2016). A polychronic view of time prioritizes harmony in interpersonal relationships over deadlines, whereas monochronic cultures put more emphasis on goal completion than relationship maintenance (Triandis, 1994). The spatial context is defined as "cues within interlocutors' physical environment that carry meaning associated with communication engagement and attention" (Adair *et al.*, 2016, p. 201). This context is not confined to the distance between the interlocutors, but also includes gestures or face expression (Adair *et al.*, 2016). Hall emphasizes that space is not limited to physical space perceived by vision, but also by other senses: "auditory space is perceived by the ears, thermal space by the skin, kinesthetic space by the muscles, and olfactory space by the nose" (Hall & Hall, 1990: 11).

In the analysis of our interview data, we use Adair *et al.*'s four contextual dimensions of communication as a guiding framework to make sense of how our interviewees' individual experiences and exposures to different cultures have shaped their way of thinking and their attitude to negotiation as reflected by the metaphors they use. In choosing this framework we followed an abductive approach in that the choice was not only theoretical, but also data driven. After collecting, and initially analyzing the interview data, we identified Adair *et al.*'s model as the most suitable theoretical framework to structure the presentation of our data. Given many interviewees referred to metaphors related to message, space, time, and relationships, Adair *et al.*'s model proved a natural fit for making sense of our data. It is important to note that when using the model and in line with the original definitions of the four contextual dimensions, the context of a metaphor is not limited to the context in which the metaphor is used. Rather, it includes the context

of the image expressed by the metaphor. In that sense, the spatial context of a metaphor is, for instance, not limited to the physical environment of the negotiation, as explained above.

Methods

For this study, we collected data from professional negotiators using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling techniques (Bell *et al.*, 2022). For the convenience sampling, we reached out to the researchers' contacts via email and LinkedIn. All targeted individuals were professionals engaged in negotiations within the areas of commerce, diplomacy, or education. For the snowball sampling, we leveraged responses from the initial message round to solicit contact information from negotiators willing to join the study. These newly identified individuals were then directly contacted by email. The reason for employing the snowball method was to expand the participant pool. As a result of these combined efforts, we conducted interviews with a total of 20 participants.

As shown in Table 1, the range of participants' negotiation experience spanned from four to 35 years. The average years of experience within the sample were 18.1 years. We calculated the sample mean omitting participants P02 and P07 who didn't disclose the length of their experience. Among the 20 negotiators constituting the sample, seven were engaged in sales roles, six held positions in general management, three were involved in project management, two worked as diplomats, one assumed a consultant role, and another operated in human resources. This sample encompassed negotiators from five distinct occupational sectors: communication, construction, diplomacy, chemical, and education. Three of the interviewed negotiators (15 percent) self-identified as female, while the remaining 17 (85 percent) identified as male.

Table 1 Overview of sample

Participant	Gender	Role	Industry	Years of experience	Nationality
P01	M	Product manager	Communication	25	Italian
P02	M	Managing director	Construction	-	French/Algerian
P03	M	Commercial director	Construction	26	French
P04	F	Human resources director	Communication	24	Bolivian/French
P05	M	Sales manager	Construction	25	Mexican/French
P06	M	Managing director	Construction	22	French
P07	M	Retired	Diplomacy	-	French/Madagascan
P08	M	Project director	Construction	10	Egyptian
P09	M	General consul	Diplomacy	21	French/Algerian
P10	M	Track and rail manager	Construction	16	Canadian/Indian
P11	M	Retired	Chemical	25	French
P12	M	Purchasing director	Communication	9	French/Dutch
P13	M	Sales director	Communication	4	Brazilian/Italian
P14	F	Sales manager	Communication	8	Colombian
P15	M	Program director	Education	35	Colombian/Italian
P16	M	Sales manager	Communication	20+	Moroccan/French
P17	M	Business developer	Communication	4	Indian
P18	M	Program director	Education	15	Indian
P19	F	Advisor	Construction	25	Vietnamese/French
P20	M	Agency director	Construction	12	French

Interviews were conducted in three languages, French, English, and Spanish using video-conferencing tools. Each interview lasted between 40 to 50 minutes. The sessions were recorded through audio devices, transcribed verbatim, and, subsequently translated into English if the interview was conducted in French or Spanish. Translation was carried out by research assistants fluent in English, French, and Spanish, following the guidelines outlined by Regmi *et al.* (2010) for qualitative research translation.

We checked our data regarding any methods-induced variations (for example, whether the fact that someone was interviewed in Spanish, as opposed to English, or the fact that one interview lasted longer than another interview, had an impact on what the interviewees said). While it was our goal to collect diverse views until the data are saturated, the diversity of views should be driven by the interviewees' experiences and reflections rather than the method used to collect the data.

Employing a semi-structured approach, the interviews featured a predetermined set of questions, with room for interviewers to introduce additional follow-up inquiries based on the course of each discussion. An English version of the interview schedule, including all questions, is attached as Appendix 1. For access to the primary data, interested readers may contact the corresponding author. This data is not publicly accessible to maintain the confidentiality of participants.

We conducted a thematic analysis of the transcribed data following the steps recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) and implemented through the NVivo software. This analysis included seven steps. Initially, we immersed ourselves in the data, repeatedly reading the translated interview transcripts. Coding followed in step two, involving the identification, and labeling of text segments relevant to the research inquiry. Codes agreed upon by all authors were cataloged in a shared NVivo database. Subsequent steps encompassed the identification of themes and sub-themes in alignment with broader patterns of meaning, informed by concepts from the literature review, in particular Adair *et al.*' (2016, 2024) model of contextual dimensions of communication. The identified themes and sub-themes were further revised until a consensus was reached among the authors on their alignment with the research question. The agreed-upon themes and sub-themes were collectively revisited for data alignment, leading to a reduction in the number of themes from 11 to 5. The naming of themes and selection of illustrative quotes were decided. Lastly, commonalities and differences in views expressed by interviewed negotiators within each theme were identified.

In alignment with recent works by Brown and Clarke (2019, 2021a, 2021b) on reflexivity in qualitative research, our approach aimed for transparency throughout data collection and analysis, acknowledging the potential influence of our individual backgrounds, positions, understandings, and experiences as researchers. Reflecting on our roles, we identified patterns of interpretation linked to our identities and negotiation experiences. We acknowledge that differing age, gender, and cultural backgrounds at times elicited divergent responses to the interview transcripts. While striving for consensus in data interpretation and presentation, we acknowledge the inherently subjective and interpretative nature of our data analysis.

Findings

To structure our interview data, we used Adair *et al.*'s (2016) model of contextual dimensions of communication as a theoretical framework. In a first step, we identified metaphors in the interview data and grouped them into five themes emerging from the data. Second, we mapped the themes to the four contextual dimensions: message, relationship, temporal, and spatial context (see

Table 2). Some metaphors could not be attributed to any of the four contextual dimensions and were, thus, grouped under the umbrella category “other”. Apart from identifying individual metaphors, we also asked interviewees about their experiences of using the metaphors they described before, during, or after a negotiation.

As to the relationship between the five themes we identified and the four communication contexts, the key difference between them is that the themes emerged from the data, whereas the communication contexts represent a theoretical construct. When we tried to make sense of the five themes we identified, we noticed their similarity with Adair *et al.*’s four dimensions of communication contexts. For some themes, such as the theme “relationship”, the link to a communication context was very direct. For others, such as the themes “process”, or “global”, this link was less direct.

Table 2 Themes and contexts

Theme	Context				
	Message	Relationship	Time	Space	Other
Process	-	-	4	2	-
Outcome	3	-	-	1	-
Global	1	-	-	8	2
Party	-	4	-	-	-
Relationship	-	5	-	1	-

Message context

We found four instances of metaphors that could be associated with the message context of Adair *et al.*’s (2016, 2024) model (see Table 3). Three of them related to the outcome of a negotiation. One metaphor related to negotiation in general.

Table 3 Message context metaphors

Theme	Metaphor	Quotation	Participant
Outcome	Win-win	<i>“So, I always say that negotiation is a win-win, so it’s a metaphor.”</i>	P12
	Show me the money	<i>“Oh it’s very hard but it’s more like it’s an image like “show me the money”. There’s a very famous thing from a movie called Jerry McGuire where there is this scene of “show me the money” and I don’t know why but your question made me think of that.”</i>	P18
	Win-lose	<i>“In certain negotiations there can be winners and losers.”</i>	P07
Global	Recipe	<i>“I would say that it reminds me of a recipe because there are ingredients to be respected and weighed up. Indeed, in a recipe you have to be careful about the dosage as well as the taste of the others. Some people will like spicy food, others less so or not at all, so we think that we will change the way we prepare the recipe.”</i>	P19

Relationship context

We found nine metaphors that could be associated with the relationship context of Adair *et al.*'s (2016, 2024) model (see Table 4). Five of those metaphors directly referred to the relationship between the negotiators. The other four metaphors referred to the relationship indirectly in that their focus was on the negotiating parties.

Table 4 Relationship context metaphors

Theme	Metaphor	Quotation	Participant
Relationship	Marriage	<i>"It would rather be seen a bit as a kind of marriage and symbiosis. [...] Suddenly, it [a negotiation] can create long-term partnerships. So, a marriage or a couple could be an option. But in the life of a partnership, there are always hiccups and always a moment when it goes well or when we understand each other better. [...] So, I don't see it [a negotiation] as something linear, I see it as something that is constantly built like the life of a couple."</i>	P12
	Happy marriage	<i>"I would talk about a happy marriage, that is to say that everyone finds his account at the end, and so here is the happy marriage. We are in sync and we are celebrating."</i>	P09
	Seduction	<i>"Seduction is interesting at the beginning, when we get to know the person, but once the person is seduced and it is reciprocal on both sides, we are no longer in seduction. [...] Basically, exchange a service or good so it could be, for example, a good that you're buying and hence you must negotiate for it and you're paying that with money. So, for me it's an interchange of services or goods."</i>	P16
	Shaking hands	<i>"The first picture that comes to my mind is two people shaking hands, which is that you have agreed on something. And you basically make it work what you have achieved together."</i>	P10
	Outstretched hands	<i>"Well, I don't know, I mean the customer reaching out to you, looking for a solution. And so, through this outstretched hand, he would reach a satisfactory solution in relation to what he is asking."</i>	P16
Party	Carpet dealer	<i>"It's the metaphor of a carpet dealer. It's easy, it's just people haggling to lower the price, without having any other arguments to justify it."</i>	P01
	Person leaving	<i>"So, then it can be the negotiation that goes wrong? Uh... it can be the one who closes his PC [personal computer] who leaves the meeting room."</i>	P20
	Hammer and anvil	<i>"In terms of image, I would like to give one where we are more in a situation with the hammer and the anvil, i.e., a client who imposes a technology on us and we will have to adapt with the supplier and so we will try to find levers for negotiating the purchase."</i>	P12
	Hare and tortoise	<i>"So, I use the example of, let's say, the hare and the tortoise."</i>	P15

Spatial context

We found 12 metaphors that could be assigned to the spatial context of Adair et al.'s (2016, 2024) model (see Table 5). One of them referred to the outcome of a negotiation, two to the process of negotiation, one to the relationship between negotiators, and six to negotiations in general.

Table 5 Spatial context metaphors

Theme	Metaphor	Quotation	Participant
Outcome	Foundation of a building	<i>"The foundation of a building so that the building can withstand earthquakes. This construction must be solid. In relation to the negotiation, it is the same, I think that both parties must be solid and satisfied, which could then perhaps lead to a future partnership."</i>	P19
Process	To reach top of a mountain	<i>"The picture could be a guy trying to reach the top of a mountain because it demands a lot of effort to reach. OK, that would be my picture for that."</i>	P14
	Two-way street	<i>"I can tell you a metaphor. Yes, one metaphor that I can share with you [...] is a two-way street. If you give fairness, you receive fairness and vice versa. It's not a one-way street. You cannot just receive."</i>	P10
Relationship	Two people connected by a very fine thread	<i>"This image would look like two people connected by a very fine thread, very fragile. Each holds the thread by one end. And at times one of the two people may pull, and at that moment when one pulls, it is absolutely necessary that the other lets go the thread a little bit to ensure that the thread remains intact and doesn't break."</i>	P04
Global	Landscape	<i>"When I talk about a negotiation, for me a negotiation has become the perfect landscape, like the beach, because nowadays I enjoy it."</i>	P14
	Mountain	<i>"It [a negotiation] would really be either a mountain or a cliff."</i>	P06
	Shared space	<i>"I think that negotiation is the space that you share with other people whom you are trying to convince."</i>	P14
	Universe	<i>"I will represent negotiation as the universe. That is to say, it is something that rotates in perpetuity with a continual effect that is permanent and at the same time different planets of different sizes that are connected to each other, and our role is to be in the middle of all these planets and to adapt."</i>	P07
	Two people around a table	<i>"So here is an image, it would be two people around a table, preferably not too big the table to be able to raise his voice and be able to see each other well. That is the negotiation."</i>	P20
	Meeting around a campfire	<i>"For me it [a negotiation] would have aspects of perhaps a meeting around a campfire."</i>	P14
	Green field	<i>"So, before going to a negotiation, first [...] it's a green field."</i>	P09
	Balance	<i>"We must try to maintain the balance, otherwise we have agreed on something that will be useless in the future or that will create too much tension. [...] the goal for me [when preparing for a negotiation] is to try to understand the forces involved, mine and that of the other party."</i>	P11

Temporal context

Four metaphors contained references to processes evolving over time and where, thus, attributed to the temporal context according Adairs et al.'s (2016, 2014) model (see Table 6).

Table 6 Temporal context metaphors

Theme	Metaphor	Quotation	Participant
Process	Dance	<i>"A kind of dance, a kind of tango, for example, because in negotiations there are several phases, an approach phase where you try to get to know your interlocutor and to get to know a little more about him. [...] And then you need a bit of charm too because you have to show some interest in the person."</i>	P01
	Game	<i>"It becomes a kind of chess game because everyone can have their own strategy. There can also be traps in the negotiation, so you have to be aware. You have to be very careful and not go too fast, you have to leave time to think while you are talking."</i>	P01
	Yoga	<i>"I would also come up with an image of people doing yoga. [...] I believe that in a negotiation you want both sides to be happy. That's why I like the image of yoga."</i>	P15
	Story	<i>"Negotiation is first and foremost a story, that is to say that it is an exchange, a negotiation is never an act, a trivial act, and it depends strongly on the stakes of the negotiation."</i>	P17

Other contexts

Two metaphors could not be attributed to any of the four communication contexts described in Adairs et al.'s (2016, 2024) model (see Table 7). Both of those metaphors referred to negotiation in general.

Table 7 Other metaphors

Theme	Metaphor	Quotation	Participant
Global	Good war	<i>"A battle in which each side has its strengths, and each side would like to win the battle. The goal of this battle is, ultimately, for everyone to be happy. It's a beautiful battle, a good war."</i>	P05
	Not a war	<i>"Negotiation is not a war. That's what I want to say. Negotiation means reaching agreements, making concessions on both sides, but it's not a war."</i>	P19

Experiences of using metaphors

Apart from identifying individual metaphors and mapping them to the four contextual dimensions of Adairs *et al.*'s (2016, 2024) model, we also asked interviewees about their experiences of using the metaphors they described before, during, or after a negotiation. Four participants reported having used metaphors when preparing for a negotiation. They used them to either mentally prepare for an upcoming negotiation or as an image for guiding the setting up of the venue of an upcoming negotiation (see Table 8).

Table 8 Experiences of using metaphors before a negotiation

Use	Quotation	Participant
Mental preparation	<i>“That is to say that in all the negotiations or discussions that we can have with a supplier on many aspects, anticipation is key. So, if I’m in a negotiation, we’ll say arm wrestling, or the clients will really fight to obtain the contract. I’m going to try to anticipate it, I’m going to give myself all the keys so that I get the maximum.”</i>	P09
	<i>“So, before going to a negotiation, first [...] it’s a green field.”</i>	P09
	<i>“We must try to maintain the balance, otherwise we have agreed on something that will be useless in the future or that will create too much tension. [...] the goal for me [when preparing for a negotiation] is to try to understand the forces involved, mine and that of the other party.”</i>	P11
Setting up venue	<i>“So, if we make the simile, let’s say, with the image I gave you [a meeting around a campfire], the place is important. The climate is also important, it’s important that you feel comfortable. That the temperature is pleasant, that you feel good in that space and that it makes the other person feel good.”</i>	P08

15 participants reported having used metaphors during negotiation meetings for a range of reasons (see Table 9). For instance, one participant described using metaphors as communication tools to efficiently get across a difficult topic. Another participant described using metaphors during a negotiation meeting to improve the emotional atmosphere. A further participant reported using them only very infrequently in order to overcome difficulties during a negotiation. Two participants described experiences where metaphors acted as mental images helping them to approach the dynamics of a negotiation. One participant stated having used metaphors only indirectly by “making them feel” during a negotiation. Another participant described an example of using a metaphor to demonstrate cultural awareness during a negotiation and, again, another participant how using a metaphor during a negotiation can help getting noticed by the other party. One final participant pointed out the risk of misunderstanding when using a metaphor during a negotiation.

Table 9 Experiences of using metaphors during a negotiation

Use	Quotation	Participant
Communication tool	<i>“Sometimes, when you want, especially when my interlocutors are not technical and as I work in services, they have a technological nature, sometimes I use metaphors so that the clients can understand what I want to convey. And I also feel that it’s a good tool because when you speak with metaphors it conveys, it’s easier to get your message across, isn’t it?”</i>	P08
Improving the atmosphere	<i>“In a negotiation scenario, there are also metaphors which mean that we can raise certain topics of discussion to lighten the atmosphere a little.”</i>	P01
Overcoming difficulties	<i>“The truth is that I don’t use them [metaphors] very often. I use them only when I see that there are difficulties. Let’s say that I usually think that a frank and direct conversation is much better.”</i>	P07
Mental model	<i>“So, in fact, if we keep the example of the recipe, we can say that we can modify it, add a little salt, and if it’s too salty, we’ll remove certain ingredients and then add a little sugar, and so on. In the negotiation, we must always leave ourselves some way out. In fact, you have to be capable of modifying your negotiation according to the way in which your interlocutors are going to act. If you come with something that is too well constructed, and you don’t have a way out, the negotiation leverage will be complicated.”</i>	P10
	<i>“If I keep the image of the scale, it will bring the extremes in the discussion to something that will be a common thread, but closest to a balance. So, it means that maybe at certain times in this negotiation, I will concede [...]. If I didn’t concede, uh, there may be too much way, either on my side or on the other side. So, my nature is rather to try to guide the other to the point of balance.”</i>	P11
Indirect use	<i>“No, I didn’t use it, but I think I made it feel. I made the fact felt that I am watching over the quality of the relationship, and I absolutely want to understand the counterpart.”</i>	P18
Cultural awareness	<i>“I am now thinking about my next negotiation. It’s with Brazilians, and Brazilians, they love football, so we can say that the metaphor will be a football match, where the goal is to finish tied.”</i>	P14
Getting noticed	<i>“Of course, in fact a negotiation is also about seducing the person in front of you. You have to know how to get noticed, how to be appreciated, how to develop an image.”</i>	P02
Risk of mis-understanding	<i>“Well, afterwards it’s always possible to make a blunder, you say something that you shouldn’t have said and so on, but for me, these are also the risks.”</i>	P06

Three participants talked about how they used metaphors following a completed negotiation (see Table 10). Two of them stated that metaphors helped them to establish and maintain a good relationship with former negotiation partners even after the negotiation had ended. One participant described how a metaphor can help to implement a deal agreed in a negotiation.

Table 10 Experiences of using metaphors after a negotiation

Use	Quotation	Participant
Shaping relationship after negotiation	<i>“Yes, because I think that if you manage to make them understand you with the metaphor, then you open a relationship of trust with the person, they understand you, and you will see them connect with you. But also, with the metaphors, sometimes you don’t know how the person is going to take the goal outside, right? So, I think that yes, it [a metaphor] can help you to, let’s say, strengthen the relationship as long as the person receives it as you are transmitting it to them.”</i>	P08
	<i>“Yes, absolutely, for example, I could talk to you about a metaphor about the foundation of a building so that the building can withstand earthquakes. This construction must be solid. In relation to the negotiation, it is the same, I think that both parties must be solid and satisfied, which could then perhaps lead to a future partnership.”</i>	P10
Shaping implementation of outcome	<i>“I think that well, I took the universe as a bit of a reference and finally it means that many planets are to be taken into consideration. The conclusion must be a good alignment of the different planets. That is to say not too close so that it does not burn and not too far because otherwise, there will be no more heat, so we must find a good alignment with the right distances so that the universe continues to live without one burning the other.”</i>	P15

Discussion

The analysis enabled us to ascertain whether specific types of metaphors occurred more frequently within particular communication contexts. What we mean by saying that a metaphor occurs in a certain communication context is that the metaphor or its explanation by the respondents refers to one of the four communication contexts identified and defined by Adair *et al.* (space, time, relationship, or message). Process metaphors predominantly manifested in temporal communication contexts but also, to a much lesser degree, in spatial contexts. Relationship and party metaphors emerged exclusively in the relationship context with just one exemption of a relationship metaphor that was assigned to the spatial context. The occurrence of global metaphors exhibited a less discernible pattern, with one appearing in a message context, and others in spatial or other contexts. These findings align well with the existing literature: process metaphors inherently relate to temporal aspects, while relationship metaphors naturally find their place in relationship contexts. An interesting observation is that, overall, the majority of metaphors surfaced in spatial and relationship contexts. This suggests that negotiators often direct their attention toward the relationship when conceptualizing a negotiation or visualize a negotiation as a space.

If we compare the metaphors that emerged in our analysis with the four dominant themes and metaphors identified by Cohen (2001a: 32) – “industrial relations, engineering, Christian theology, and sports and games” – we can conclude that the only overlapping theme is games and sports. In our data, the metaphor of chess emphasized the importance of having your own strategy in a negotiation, and the metaphor of yoga stood for a win-win potential: wanting both sides to be happy. While Cohen (2001a) explained the frequent occurrence of sports and games metaphors by the desire of negotiators to play by the rules and by a long-standing tradition of playing competitive sport and games in English-speaking countries, our respondents viewed sport as not necessarily competitive. A potential explanation for these differences can be the research context: Cohen

derived the four themes from the English language, as opposed to French, Hebrew, or Arabic, while our sample was more culturally diverse. Our findings also expand the literature with the following themes: relationship, party, outcome, process, and negotiation in general (labelled as “global”). These findings show how diverse negotiation metaphors can be and call for further investigation of them in different cultural and professional contexts.

As to the uses of metaphors, our analysis reveals a distinct pattern, where metaphors employed prior to a negotiation predominantly surfaced in a relationship context, closely followed by temporal and spatial contexts. Metaphors employed during a negotiation were more difficult to assign. They spanned all four communication contexts, with a minor preeminence within the relationship context. The application of metaphors after a negotiation was almost exclusively confined to a relationship context. These findings yield insights into the utilization of metaphors by negotiators. Before and after a negotiation, the negotiators we interviewed predominantly situated their conceptualization within a relationship context, whereas during a negotiation, they employed metaphors across diverse communication contexts.

Our literature review and results indicate the relevance of the temporal aspect of the use of metaphors in the proposed theoretical model. Metaphors were used before, during, and after a negotiation for various purposes: for example, to build trust and set up a venue before a negotiation, to communicate effectively and to improve the atmosphere during a negotiation, and to make sense of the results and to maintain a relationship after a negotiation. Yet, these uses were not sufficient to build into consistent patterns in our findings, and the temporal perspective was not a salient aspect of our data collection by design. Future research can further explore how metaphors are used before, during, and after a negotiation, and how they can influence negotiation processes and outcomes.

Theoretical contributions

Our principal theoretical contribution arises from being the first empirical study that systematically examines metaphors extracted from qualitative interview data through the lens of Adair *et al.*'s (2016, 2024) theory of contextual dimensions of communication. This approach expands the boundaries of Adair *et al.*'s framework to encompass the domain of metaphors used in negotiation contexts. As such, our main theoretical contribution lies in the integration of different literature streams which haven't been combined before: the literature on negotiation (e.g., Brett & Thompson, 2016), the literature on metaphors (e.g., Lakoff, 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), and the literature on communication contexts (Adair *et al.*, 2016).

A second contribution to the literature on metaphors and negotiation is based on our finding establishing the positive role of metaphors regarding the integration and summary of information within a negotiation setting (Deetz & Mumby, 1985; Hartel & Savolainen, 2016; Ziemkiewicz & Kosara, 2008). This underscores the potential of metaphors as effective linguistic tools for facilitating communication, a critical undertaking for the success of any negotiation endeavor. Participants' numerous examples depicting the capacity of metaphors to enhance communication enrich both metaphor theory and the negotiation literature. However, participants also illuminated a potential risk in that improper use of metaphors could potentially lead to misunderstandings in negotiations.

A third contribution of our study lies in the evidence we have provided regarding negotiators' use of metaphors as mental models (O'Brien & Albrecht, 1992; Radvansky *et al.*, 1993). Participants illustrated how metaphors played a positive role in aiding them to visualize and

structure their thoughts, particularly when preparing for upcoming negotiations. Moreover, these metaphors were instrumental in cultivating desired mindsets and positively influencing the emotional dynamics within negotiation meetings. Beyond this, participants articulated how the mental model reflected by metaphors aided in nurturing enduring and constructive relationships with former negotiation counterparts beyond the negotiation itself. These narratives establish the constructive utilization of metaphors as mental models, thereby advancing both the realm of mental model theory and the negotiation literature on effective preparation, execution, and post-negotiation engagement.

A fourth theoretical contribution lies in the identification of certain metaphors that emphasize either the integrative and/or problem-solving aspect of negotiation (e.g., the metaphors dance, happy marriage, shaking hands, two-way street, story, mountain to climb, etc.) or the distributive/competitive aspect of negotiation (e.g., the metaphors war, battle, sports competition, win-lose, show me the money, etc.). Metaphors in those two groups can be regarded as representatives of the integrative and distributive approaches to negotiation (e.g., Brett & Thompson, 2016; Gunia *et al.*, 2016) but also relate to the functions of value-claiming and value-creation (Allred, 2000; Craver, 2010) as discussed in the literature on negotiation strategy.

A fifth theoretical contribution of our study is its multicultural dimension. In their recent review of negotiation research, Boothby and colleagues (2023) call for developing a more flexible approach to deal with the inevitable uncertainty and nuances when negotiating with people from different cultures. Our study makes an attempt to develop such an approach by exploring and making sense of the experiences and perceptions of negotiators who have been exposed to multiple cultures.

Practical implications

Based on our findings, we make six recommendations for negotiators in relation to the use of metaphors in negotiation. When making those recommendations, it is important to note that the first two recommendations are aimed at the use of metaphors in general. The remaining three recommendations focus on specific functions of metaphors within a negotiation process. All recommendations are based on the views expressed by the negotiators we interviewed:

1. Based on our findings, we recommend negotiators to think about negotiations in terms of metaphors that stress the integrative and/or problem-solving aspect of negotiation, such as the metaphors dance, happy marriage, shaking hands, two-way street, story, mountain to climb, etc. At the same time, we caution negotiators to employ overly competitive and/or distributive metaphors, such as the metaphors war, battle, sports competition, win-lose, show me the money, etc., in the context of a negotiation.
2. The use of metaphors carries the risk of facilitating misunderstandings. To effectively mitigate this risk, we propose the practice of actively explaining and discussing a metaphor with the negotiating counterpart at the point of its introduction. This proactive approach serves to enhance shared understanding and foster more effective communication.
3. We advise negotiators to reflect on the metaphors they employ and encounter throughout a negotiation process. By actively contemplating the nature, origins, and potential impacts of these metaphors, negotiators can learn how to use metaphors to influence the negotiation outcome. Recognizing and understanding one's own metaphoric language and thought is a crucial step towards the effective use of metaphors within a negotiation.
4. We recommend the use of certain metaphors as a tool for synthesizing information during

negotiation processes. What we mean by that is that negotiators may benefit from preparing metaphoric descriptions of particularly complex points that need to be addressed during a negotiation. For instance, in a scenario where the opposing party grapples with the complexity of a technically demanding subject matter, employing a metaphor can enhance their grasp of the issue at hand.

5. We found some evidence that the use of certain metaphors by negotiators can positively influence the emotional atmosphere of negotiation meetings. On that basis, we recommend the use of metaphoric language to positively influence otherwise dense and/or heated atmospheres in negotiation discussions.
6. Negotiators should also consider the possibilities of negative effects of using metaphors. One such negative effect is that metaphors might limit the thinking or mislead cognition. For example, the metaphor of war may trigger the fixed-pie bias and prevent negotiators from identifying integrative potential. Further, metaphors can be used as a manipulation tool. For example, metaphors such as balance or two-way street may incentivize negotiators to make more concessions. Another potential negative effect is the misinterpretation of metaphors, especially in multicultural environments.

Limitations and future research

Due to the qualitative nature of our research design and a sample size of 20 negotiators with only three female participants, our findings hold limited generalizability. Although our thematic analysis achieved saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015), alternative interviewee samples might have yielded different outcomes. This limitation is intrinsic to our chosen methodology, which aimed to capture rich field data instead of a large representative sample. Qualitative studies elucidate human experiences but lack broad generalizability. Their value lies in understanding individual, subjective perspectives, such as those of professional negotiators in our case, through detailed descriptions of their cognitive and symbolic actions, and through the richness of meaning associated with self-observed behavior.

Secondly, translation bias is probable, given the majority of our interviews were conducted in French and Spanish and then translated into English. To mitigate this, we adhered to established translation guidelines (Regmi *et al.*, 2010).

Thirdly, while we have analyzed our data with a view to identify a salient pattern between negotiators' own cultural background and the metaphors they use, we were not able to establish any meaningful patterns. For this reason, we decided not to include this analysis in the manuscript. This may be explained by either our relatively small sample size or the fact that we interviewed people with multicultural backgrounds implying that cultural differences in the use of metaphors may have been less pronounced.

Lastly, our results reflect views solely from negotiators, lacking input from their negotiation counterparts. This precludes verification of the reported efficacy of using metaphors. Social desirability bias may further compound this limitation, as participants might underreport negative experiences in relation to the use of metaphoric language or overreport instances of successfully uses, influenced by a desire to manage impressions.

In terms of future research directions, our exploratory analysis of professional negotiators' perspectives on the use of metaphors in negotiation has unveiled a range of metaphors that warrant deeper exploration through experimental studies. Specifically, our attention has been drawn to the potential causal effects of frequently mentioned metaphors, such as dance, sports game, battle,

landscape, etc. in relation to the facilitation of communication as well as the management of emotions during negotiation meetings. Based on our study, these metaphors have emerged as potential candidates for either independent predictors or mediators in explaining the success or failure of communication efforts and attempts to manage the atmosphere during a negotiation.

More specifically, it may be interesting to conduct an experiment in which subjects are asked to: 1) familiarize themselves with a metaphor randomly drawn from a set of four metaphors (e.g., battle, sports competition, dance, and marriage); 2) use that metaphor as a guiding principle in a negotiation role play exercise; 3) conduct the role play exercise; 4) report the objective (economic) value of the outcome of the role play exercise; and 5) report the subjective value of the outcome of the role play exercise. In such an experiment, the type of metaphor would act as an independent variable, whereas the economic and subjective value of the outcome would act as dependent variables respectively. Based on our study, one might hypothesize that the subjective and objective value of the outcome differ depending on the type of metaphor the subjects were primed with. For instance, one might suspect that priming subjects with more integrative metaphors (such as the metaphors dance or marriage) result in a higher joint economic value and higher subjective value compared to more distributive metaphors (such as battle or sports competition).

Another experiment based on our study, could investigate the effect of metaphors on the emotional environment of a negotiation. For that purpose, one could prime subjects with a certain metaphor (e.g., the metaphor battle or the metaphor marriage), ask them to conduct a negotiation exercise, and then compare their evaluation of the emotional environment during the role play with the evaluations of an un-primed control group of subjects.

Another future research project could investigate if and how the use of metaphors changes over the course of a negotiation or in relation to the specific context of the negotiation. For instance, one could have participants recall specific negotiation situations where they used or were mindful of a particular metaphor and explain how that metaphor influenced their planning, tactics, and outcomes etc. Such a project would be capable of capturing the dynamic aspects of metaphors, as opposed to the more stable aspects of metaphors that we investigated in our study.

Lastly, a potential research initiative could center on the use of metaphors in multicultural and multilingual negotiations. Given that only a limited subset of participants engaged in multicultural negotiations, but a large number commented on the cultural dimension of metaphors, a study dedicated to comprehending negotiators' perspectives on culture's impact on metaphors in a negotiation context could be beneficial. This study would explore views, experiences, and responses of negotiators regarding the influence of culture on the use of metaphors.

Conclusion

The findings of our qualitative interview study confirm that professional negotiators use metaphoric language within negotiations. When doing so, they use a range of different metaphor types, such as metaphors related to the negotiation process, the parties, the relationship, the outcome, or the globality of a negotiation. Complementing existing studies on metaphoric language in negotiation, we were able to empirically show that the predominant use of metaphors occurs in a contextual relationship or spatial dimension of communication as opposed to a message, or time, context. Further, the study found initial evidence for some positive effects of using metaphors in negotiations: facilitating communication, positively influencing the emotional environment, and acting as helpful mental models in the preparation and follow-up of negotiation meetings.

The principal practical take-aways for negotiators from our study are: 1) When negotiating, it may be beneficial from the perspective of a negotiator to use metaphors that emphasize the integrative and/or problem-solving aspects of negotiation; 2) To improve the effective use of metaphors in negotiation, it may be useful to critically reflect on the types, origins, and uses of one's own metaphors; 3) Certain metaphors may be useful for summarizing and integrating information in the context of negotiation; 4) Certain metaphoric language may be used to improve the atmosphere in a negotiation meeting or to get across a difficult point.

References

- Adair, W. L., & Brett, J. M. (2005). The Negotiation Dance: Time, Culture, and Behavioral Sequences in Negotiation. *Organization Science*, 16(1), 33–51.
- Adair, W. L., Buchan, N. R., Chen, X.-P., & Liu, D. (2016). A model of communication context and measure of context dependence. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 2(2), 198–217.
- Adair, W. L., Buchan, N. R., Chen, X. P., & Liu, L. A. (2024). How Does Culture Communicate at Work? An Introduction. In *What Isn't Being Said: Culture and Communication at Work* (pp. 1–15). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Allred, K. G. (2000). Distinguishing best and strategic practices: A framework for managing the dilemma between claiming and creating value. *Negotiation journal*, 16(4), 387–397.
- Alvesson, M., & Kärreman, D. (2000). Taking the linguistic turn in organizational research: Challenges, responses, consequences. *The journal of applied behavioral science*, 36(2), 136–158.
- Bell, E., Bryman, A., & Harley, B. (2022). *Business research methods*. Oxford university press.
- Boothby, E. J., Cooney, G., & Schweitzer, M. E. (2023). Embracing complexity: A review of negotiation research. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 74(1), 299–332.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health*, 11(4), 589–597.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021a). Can I use TA? Should I use TA? Should I not use TA? Comparing reflexive thematic analysis and other pattern-based qualitative analytic approaches. *Counselling and psychotherapy research*, 21(1), 37–47.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021b). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative research in psychology*, 18(3), 328–352.
- Brett, J., & Thompson, L. (2016). Negotiation. *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*, 136, 68–79.
- Chin, T., Wang, S., & Rowley, C. (2021). Polychronic knowledge creation in cross-border business models: a sea-like heuristic metaphor. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 25(1), 1–22.
- Chmielecki, M. (2013). Conceptual negotiation metaphors across cultures—research findings from Poland, China, The United States and Great Britain. *Journal of Intercultural Management*, 5(3), 103–118.
- Cohen, R. (2000). Meaning, interpretation and international negotiation. *Global Society*, 14(3), 317–335.
- Cohen, R. (2001a). Language and conflict resolution: The limits of English. *International studies review*, 3(1), 25–51.

- Cohen, R. (2001b). Language and negotiation: A Middle East lexicon. *Language and diplomacy*, 67-91.
- Cohen, R. (2003). Adversaries? Partners? How about counterparts? On metaphors in the practice and teaching of negotiation and dispute resolution. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 20(4), 433-440.
- Cornelissen, J. P., Holt, R., & Zundel, M. (2011). The role of analogy and metaphor in the framing and legitimization of strategic change. *Organization Studies*, 32(12), 1701-1716.
- Cornelissen, J. P., Oswick, C., Thøger Christensen, L., & Phillips, N. (2008). Metaphor in organizational research: Context, modalities and implications for research—Introduction. *Organization Studies*, 29(1), 7-22.
- Craver, C. B. (2010). The inherent tension between value creation and value claiming during bargaining interactions. *Cardozo Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 12(1).
- Deetz, S., & Mumby, D. (1985). Metaphors, information, and power. *Information and behavior*, 1, 369-386.
- Docherty, J. S. (2004). Metaphors: Narratives, Metaphors, and Negotiation. *Marquette Law Review*, 87(4), 847-852.
- Faure, G. O. (1998). Negotiation: the Chinese concept. *Negotiation journal*, 14(2), 137-148.
- Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(9), 1408-1416.
- Gelfand, M. J., & McCusker, C. (2017). Metaphor and the cultural construction of negotiation: A paradigm for research and practice. In M. J. Gannon & K. L. Newman (Eds.), *The Blackwell Handbook of Cross-Cultural Management* (pp. 292-314). Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Giacomantonio, M., De Dreu, C. K., & Mannetti, L. (2010). Now you see it, now you don't: Interests, issues, and psychological distance in integrative negotiation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98(5), 761-774.
- Gunia, B. C., Brett, J. M., & Gelfand, M. J. (2016). The science of culture and negotiation. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 8, 78-83.
- Halevy, N., & Berson, Y. (2022). Thinking about the distant future promotes the prospects of peace: A construal-level perspective on intergroup conflict resolution. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 66(6), 1119-1143.
- Hall, E. T. (1966). *The hidden dimension*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Hall, E. T. (1973). *The silent language*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Hall, E. T. (1989). *Beyond culture*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Hall, E. T., & Hall, E. (1976). How cultures collide. *Psychology today*, 10(2), 66-83.
- Hall, E. T., & Hall, M. R. (1990). *Understanding cultural differences: Germans, French and Americans*. London, UK: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Hartel, J., & Savolainen, R. (2016). Pictorial metaphors for information. *Journal of Documentation*, 72(5), 794-812.
- Henderson, M. D., & Trope, Y. (2009). The effects of abstraction on integrative agreements: When seeing the forest helps avoid getting tangled in the trees. *Social cognition*, 27(3), 402-417.
- Henderson, M. D., Trope, Y., & Carnevale, P. J. (2006). Negotiation from a near and distant time perspective. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 91(4), 712-729.
- Hong, Y. Y., Morris, M. W., Chiu, C. Y., & Benet-Martinez, V. (2000). Multicultural minds: A dynamic constructivist approach to culture and cognition. *American psychologist*, 55(7), 709-720.

- Imai, L., & Gelfand, M. J. (2009). Interdisciplinary perspectives on culture, conflict, and negotiation. In R. S. Bhaget & R. M. Steers (Eds.), *Cambridge handbook of culture, organization, and work* (pp. 334-372). Cambridge University Press.
- Ippolito, L. M., & Adler, N. J. (2018). Shifting metaphors, shifting mindsets: Using music to change the key of conflict. *Journal of Business Research*, 85, 358-364.
- Kuckertz, A. (2019). Let's take the entrepreneurial ecosystem metaphor seriously! *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, 11.
- Lakoff, G. (1993). *The contemporary theory of metaphor*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). The metaphorical structure of the human conceptual system. *Cognitive science*, 4(2), 195-208.
- Landau, M. J., Nelson, N. M., & Keefer, L. A. (2015). Divergent effects of metaphoric company logos: Do they convey what the company does or what I need? *Metaphor and Symbol*, 30(4), 314-338.
- Leary, K., Pillemer, J., & Wheeler, M. (2013). Negotiating with Emotion. *Harvard Business Review*.
- Liu, L. A., Adair, W. L., & Bello, D. C. (2015). Fit, misfit, and beyond fit: Relational metaphors and semantic fit in international joint ventures. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 46, 830-849.
- Liu, L. A., Chua, C. H., & Stahl, G. K. (2010). Quality of communication experience: Definition, measurement, and implications for intercultural negotiations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95(3), 469-486.
- Marmol Queralto, J. (2021). Force-dynamics and Conceptual Metaphor in Brexit negotiations: The construal of Gibraltar's status in Spanish online newspapers. *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines*, 13(1), 31-54.
- Meunier, S., & Morin, J.-F. (2016). No Agreement is an Island: Negotiating TTIP in a Dense Regime Complex 1. In *The politics of Transatlantic trade negotiations* (pp. 173-186). Routledge.
- Moran, R. (1989). Seeing and believing: Metaphor, image, and force. *Critical inquiry*, 16(1), 87-112.
- Morris, M. W., & Fu, H. Y. (2001). How does culture influence conflict resolution? A dynamic constructivist analysis. *Social Cognition*, 19(3), 324-349.
- Morris, M. W., Sheldon, O. J., Ames, D. R., & Young, M. J. (2007). Metaphors and the market: Consequences and preconditions of agent and object metaphors in stock market commentary. *Organizational behavior and human decision processes*, 102(2), 174-192.
- O'Brien, E. J., & Albrecht, J. E. (1992). Comprehension strategies in the development of a mental model. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 18(4), 777-784.
- Radvansky, G. A., Spieler, D. H., & Zacks, R. T. (1993). Mental model organization. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 19(1), 95-114.
- Regmi, K., Naidoo, J., & Pilkington, P. (2010). Understanding the processes of translation and transliteration in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 9(1), 16-26.
- Schlie, E. H., & Young, M. A. (2008). The rhythm of the deal: Negotiation as a dance. *Negotiation journal*, 27(2), 191-203.
- Smith, T. H. (2005). Metaphors for navigating negotiations. *Negotiation journal*, 21(3), 343-364.
- Smith, T. H. (2009). When experts educate, what do their metaphors say? Complex metaphor structure in the professional conflict resolution literature. *ibérica*, 17, 175-196.

- Spector, B. I. (1996). Metaphors of international negotiation. *International Negotiation*, 1(1), 1-9.
- Tourish, D., & Hargie, O. (2012). Metaphors of failure and the failures of metaphor: A critical study of root metaphors used by bankers in explaining the banking crisis. *Organization Studies*, 33(8), 1045-1069.
- Triandis, H. C. (1994). *Culture and social behavior*. McGraw-Hill.
- Triandis, H. C., Vassiliou, V., & Nassiakou, M. (1968). Three cross-cultural studies of subjective culture. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 8(4), 1.
- Trompenaars, F., & Hampden-Turner, C. (2011). *Riding the waves of culture: Understanding diversity in global business*. Nicholas Brealey International.
- Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2010). Construal-level theory of psychological distance. *Psychological review*, 117(2), 440-463.
- Ziemkiewicz, C., & Kosara, R. (2008). The shaping of information by visual metaphors. *IEEE transactions on visualization and computer graphics*, 14(6), 1269-1276.
- Wening, S., Keith, N., & Abele, A. E. (2016). High construal level can help negotiators to reach integrative agreements: The role of information exchange and judgement accuracy. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 55(2), 206-226.

Appendix

Appendix A: Interview guide

Introductory question

1. Please, introduce yourself:
 - What is your name?
 - What is your nationality?
 - In which company are you working?
 - What is your current role?
 - For how long have you been in this role?

Metaphors in negotiation

2. If you had to describe a negotiation as a picture/image/metaphor, what would that look like?
3. If you think about an upcoming negotiation, can you describe, how the picture/image/metaphor you described earlier:
 - Influences the way you prepare for the negotiation?
 - Influences the way you approach and conduct the negotiation?
 - Influences the outcome of the negotiation?
4. Have you ever used a picture/image/metaphor in your actual negotiations? If yes:
 - Which pictures have you used?
 - How often do you use them?
 - Do you communicate them to your counterpart?
 - Does it influence your relationship after the negotiation?

5. Apart from the picture/image/metaphor you just described, are there any other pictures/images/metaphors that come to your mind when you think about negotiation?
6. When you think about the pictures you described earlier in the interview, where do you think they come from?
7. Do you think these pictures/images/metaphors are related to:
 - Your cultural background? Can you explain?
 - The cultures you have been exposed to? Can you explain?
 - Your negotiation training? Can you explain?
 - Your negotiation experience? Can you explain?