

Network Pictures: making sense of metaphors the IMP way

Abstract

‘Network pictures’ is a metaphorical term for considering managers cognitive maps of the business networks in which they operate (Henneberg et al., 2010). This pictures agenda, influenced by the notion of sense-making and complexity, is one with considerable impetus within the IMP group (Ford and Redwood, 2005; Henneberg et al., 2006; Mouzas et al., 2008; Henneberg et al., 2010, Ramos and Ford, 2011). This paper investigates how the metaphor, ‘network pictures’, develops and restricts the creative theoretical developments within the IMP group. Following Hunt and Mennon (1985) this paper investigates the metaphoric transfer of the IMP pictures agenda. Our main proposition is that the network pictures agenda, although theoretically fruitful to date, needs further enhancement to develop a richer and diverse consideration of cognition and sense-making (Colville and Pye 2010). Picking up on some of the suggestions of Leek and Mason (2010) and Colville and Pye (2010) this paper proposes a new metaphor of ‘moving’ pictures. The paper concludes with a discussion on the strength of the alternative metaphor and highlights possible methodologies to work alongside the current cognitive and sense-making approaches.

Keywords: network pictures, metaphor, discourse

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Introduction

The use of metaphors within the marketing discipline is pervasive and is often not even noticed by the reader (Hunt and Menon, 1995). For example “distribution channels” – is a metaphor for products transferring between organisations through “supply chains” – which is a metaphor for linked organisations. Yet, both distribution channels and supply chains have become part of the everyday discourse within the marketing discipline – even being used as textbook and subject names. Another metaphor particularly important to IMP scholars is the link between marriage and relationship stages (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987). Metaphors therefore play an important role within marketing discourse and thought development (Hunt and Menon, 1995).

Metaphors communicate abstract concepts into categories which enhance understanding of the message via their ability to enhance the context of the message through resemblance of the terms to other categories or criteria. They are particularly helpful in transferring added meanings for vague, and abstract concepts. In conjunction with storytelling they can assist managers and or teachers to communicate values and ideas; emphasise the requirements for action, share knowledge and lead people (Denning, 2004). When conducting research metaphors are used by interviewees when describing their experience within organisations (Jacobs and Heracleous, 2006; Mulvey and Kavalam, 2010) or used by researchers to elicit different thinking patterns during interviews (Helkkula and Philström, 2010). Marketing metaphors are also used when communicating brands (Buchanan-Oliver, Cruz and Schroeder, 2010). This paper focuses on the use of metaphors to facilitate creative theoretical thought (Hunt and Menon, 1995). In particular the “Network Picture” metaphor and its ability to enhance and constrain creative thought.

Given the recent rise and importance of network picture discourse for future research approaches, this paper seeks to analyse the network picture metaphor in relation to its ability to generate new research avenues. We argue that business networks are not just simple codes of denotative representations as they also involve vastly imaginative figurative associations involving metaphors, metonymy, synecdoche, irony and a panoply of other tropes. Yet, the Network Pictures metaphor signals a simple ‘photographic’ representation possibly limiting the way thought can develop and discourse within the area of business networks.

The study of metaphors comes under the study of discourse and in particular, semiotics. Semiotics is the study of signs and signal processing and is particularly important when considering metaphors and how they transfer meaning to the reader. Marketing research using metaphors to enhance creative thought can be problematic with some academics and managers rejecting their use out of hand (Hunt and Menon, 1995; Denning 2004). Yet, the analysis of whether metaphors enhance or limit creative thought within research has a long history which has been largely ignored within the network pictures discourse (for exceptions see: Geiger and Finch, 2010). This paper contributes to the network picture discourse by analysing the various network picture metaphors and the network movie metaphor (Purchase, et al. 2010). Analysing the dimensions of metaphoric transfer of this research agenda can

highlight current weaknesses, strengths and gaps. Thus, this paper contributes to knowledge by offering suggestions on a future research agenda using these metaphors. This paper is limited to the use of metaphors within academic discourse, rather than the use of metaphors during data collection, or the use of metaphors within interviewee narratives collected by researchers.

The paper begins with a discussion on seminal studies in the area of semiotic analysis and its relation to network pictures discourse. Discussion then focuses on the role of metaphors in generating creative theoretical thought, and analyse the network picture and related metaphors using the criteria outlined by Hunt and Menon (1995). The paper concludes with a suggestion on further progressing metaphors within IMP research for creative thought generation.

Seminal Studies in Discourse and Semiotics

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and C.S. Peirce (1839-1914) are generally regarded as the ‘fathers’ of contemporary discourse and semiotic analysis. Both traditions have followed separate but related agendas, with some degree of interpenetration. This paper concentrates on C.S Peirce’s approach to semiotic theory through his triadic model. He emphasises signs as dynamic, natural and cultural bound interlinked to form a living universe of signs (bio-semiosphere of signs). Peirce distinguishes between the:

- Interpretant: the sense made of the sign via feeling/ bodily response (not the person but the outcome of the interpretation)
- Representamen: the form which the sign takes (in this paper metaphor represents the sign)
- Object: that which the sign refers to

Pictures here are formed from the interaction of signs and objects and then form a subsequent sign for creation of further picture production or, in other words, a vast imaginative ‘moving picture’ system. The American Piercian tradition has been influential in Pragmatism /Logic and in, for example, the ‘postmodern’ semiotics of Thomas Sebeok. The Piercian tradition provides concepts of considerable benefit to the ‘pictures’ agenda within IMP research. Peirce himself claimed that his own cognitive style was pictorial which he attributed to his left-handedness (Pietarinen, 2003). Peirce’s description of his own cognitive style bears resemblance to ascriptions of dyslexics of their own ‘picture-world’, so it may be that Peirce was dyslexic. Certainly he suffered considerably from recurrent neuralgia, particularly in his youth. Peirce’s approach may be described as a diagrammatic system of logic (known as EG’s). What is more, Peirce saw the visual representation of sentences by means of his method of EG’s as reflecting an understanding of all thought as dynamically dialogical and corresponding to ‘moving pictures’ (Pietarinen, 2003).

Peirce’s general triadic model provides an understanding of dynamic chains of signification. An example of Peirce’s triadic model can be applied to the marriage metaphor commonly

used within IMP discourse. The use of this metaphor within IMP discourse will be discussed later in the paper and it applied to Pierce's triadic theory in table 1.

Insert table 1 around here.

Using the marriage metaphor example actors (interpreters) can make the metaphorical link between the attributes of marriage and the attributes of business relationships. They apply attributes of marriage to their business relationships improving their understanding and behaviour within such relationships. Therefore, the combination of the interpretant and object (whether the object be physical or imaginative) produces signs. These signs in the present time period become the foundation representamen (signs) for new future combinations. As a consequence, pictures of sensemaking are a dynamic and moving process which never ends.

In terms of objects, the triadic model distinguishes iconic, indexical and symbolic signs. Indexical signs relate to the object in terms of causation such as spots on the body indicating a virus or a photograph acts as an index showing exact aspects of the subject being photographed. Symbolic signs relate to an object by means of convention/culture, such as Red meaning stop at traffic signals or wedding ring indicating marital status. Iconic signs relate to the object by means of resemblance, such as a portrait painted of a famous person, or more importantly for this research – metaphoric representation – what marriage means within relationships. Iconic signs are signs of 'resemblance' that enable an embodied understanding. The most abundant iconic signs are metaphors that enable the object to be realised in terms of similarity or difference with objects already perceived and culturally pictured through a collective imagination eg. marriage as a metaphor for close business relationships. From a Peircian point of view, therefore, iconic signs embody perceptual picturing and are the key to any subsequent cognitive picturing, understanding and rationalisation. Focussing upon the iconic status of metaphors and their role in IMP discourse within network pictures is, therefore, a contribution that discourse, narrative and semiotics can make to the 'pictures' agenda within IMP research.

Metonyms and synecdoche are 'syntagmatic' tropes. These are contiguous signifiers of combination or chains of meaning that connect 'parts' and 'wholes'. Metonyms are rhetorical strategies of picturing things through characteristics commonly attributed to them. So the 'deep' can be poetically substituted for the ocean or executives can be metonymically referred to as 'suits'. In IMP contexts if, for example, the expression 'smokestack industries' is idiomatic metonymy for basic technologies within 'high-tech' (another metonym) industries. Synecdoche involves using part for the whole or vice versa. So if 'hands' are hired (or we employ 'white collar' staff), this is synecdoche in that it involves shared understanding that the parts represent a whole. In the film industry and theatre, for example, the 'box office' is synecdoche for sales and takings for a show and 'Hollywood' is synecdoche for the film industry. Similarly 'Wall Street' in North America and 'The City' in the U.K. are synecdoche for the finance industry. In IMP contexts if, for example, you were in a business where ICI are your supplier and two Sales Representatives for the company turns up for a meeting, your secretary might call and say "ICI have arrived". Finally, of course, the most ubiquitous synecdoche is 'the market', because it is a whole used to substitute for the parts (particular 'buyers' or 'customers').

Tropes or ‘figures of speech’ are the key discursive means by which analogical reasoning, comparison and connotative associations are made. Tropes such as metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche are the most common. Metaphor is a paradigmatic or analogical trope in that it refers to one thing in reference (as substitute) to another. Some metaphors become highly embedded, naturalised and ubiquitous in a culture’s discourse as to become invisible, tacit and taken for granted. For example, ‘thought’ and ‘knowledge’ in the West is often figuratively referred to using visual metaphors of light and language using container metaphors. So we, after looking at the problem, have ‘brilliant ideas’ which we put into words (if you *see* the point?). The metaphors effect an unspoken/subconscious habitual assumption of objectivism/essentialism that owes its heritage to Aristotle’s philosophy, which cultivated a “knowledge-creation-application-performance” (Chia, 2003: 953) Western epistemological style privileging identification of certain, foundational knowledge constituted through abstract representational language, which should always precede action.

Morgan (1986) describes how metaphors used in organizations (such as ‘machine’ metaphors for example) picture the cultural reality and identity of the organization. Metonymy and synecdoche use signification by contiguity. So a part of the object or a characteristic of the object is used to picture it. If we have a subsidiary in Liverpool of a company based in London and there is scheduled a meeting involving executives from London travelling to Liverpool, then the announcement in Liverpool that ‘The suits (synecdoche for executives) from the smoke (metonymy for London) are coming for a Pow-Wow (metaphor for meeting), then the communication is quite highly figuratively and tropally pictured.

Examples of Metaphor Use within IMP discourse

Ford and Håkansson (2006) discuss the importance of ‘theoretical metaphors’ or stereotypes such as ‘markets’ or ‘supply chains’ in forming actors’ subjective interpretations of networks, interactions and relationships. However, tropal and figurative language is far more inventive in the construction of “‘actors’ ‘network theories’” (Håkansson and Johanson 1993, p.42). When interaction turns to discourse (language, communication and knowledge) to explain the accomplishment of meaning, then it quite quickly becomes clear that framed context is a principal issue.

One of the most common metaphors used to describe business relationships is the marriage metaphor as outlined in table 1 (see: Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987; Hunt and Menon, 1995; Johnston and Hausman, 2006; Stoltman and Morgan, 2002; Celuch et al., 2006). The marriage metaphor developed from marital theory and has had a strong influence on theory development on business relationships. For example Dwyer, Schurr & Oh (1987) use the marriage metaphor to describe the stages through which relationships develop. Johnston and Hausman (2006) extend the metaphor to include family networks and power shifts within marriage networks; while Stoltman and Morgan (2002) describe the phases of relationship ending and how they are similar to divorce. Celuch et al., (2006) use the marriage metaphor

at the micro individual level to consider how social relationships influence relationship satisfaction and relationship investment. The marriage metaphor although fruitful for extending theory development has also been criticised for being used in a limiting way, and not creatively extending the boundaries of the metaphor past the standard nuclear family situations and similar styles of cooperation (Hunt and Menon, 1995; Wilkinson and Young, 1994). The main contributions of the marriage metaphor to IMP thinking are through the theoretical development of relationship stages, relationship dissolution and relationship values.

Wilkinson and Young (1994) introduced the dancing metaphor to describe the different types of relationships categories. They highlight that the marriage metaphor is limited to highly cooperative relationships, where as in reality many different types of relationships exist within networks. Each different type of relationship moves and strategizes to accommodate others in the network, while trying to portray a successful act. They categorized relationships into 8 different dancing types that describe the actions likely to occur within each category. Different types of dances include: ballroom, salsa, cha-cha-cha etc where the character of each dance align with the character of the relationship. Although extended in Wilkinson, Young, Welch and Welch (1998), the metaphor was not used further throughout the wider IMP community.

The focus of this paper though is the development of a recently new metaphor within the IMP group, that of network pictures. The concept of picturing, although used in management research, has only recently been used by IMP researchers to investigate network relationships. Henneberg et al. (2010), indicate that network picture concept is a metaphor and the next section outlines the development of the network pictures metaphor within the IMP community.

Development of the Network Picture Metaphor

The Network pictures concept was initially developed to assist managers with network strategy development (Ford et al., 2003). Network pictures guide strategic decisions in relation to: choices within existing relationships; choices about network positions and choices about how to network. Ford and Redwood (2005, p. 649) used the network pictures concept to examine network evolution and network paradoxes. They describe network pictures as “an important explanatory tool (and) may form a way of improving their understanding of the dynamic of the network and reduce the danger of missing significant changes”. This research was conducted as a longitudinal case and the network pictures developed were from the perspective of the researchers, rather than the focal company. Interestingly the network pictures, although developed by the researchers are portrayed as those ‘owned’ by the Booth company. For example: ‘the network picture held by the Booth company comprised the business leather...’. The network pictures developed in this original research had the following characteristics:

- Developed by the researcher – rather than cognitive representations by the focal company – yet written such that the pictures as those held by the focal company

- Only indicates the first tier suppliers and customers of the focal company – although ‘breadth and comprehensiveness’ of the picture is discussed and analysed.
- The connections indicated are formal connections only, while the case description indicates that informal connections also play an important role in the evolution of the organisation – it would be difficult for the researchers to include these informal connections given the time period in which the case is embedded, but it begs the question: What important relationships are left out of the network picture that play a role in the evolution of the company?

Overall, this work is important in the development of network pictures. It brought forth the importance of cognition and consideration of sense-making within IMP thinking – although should not be considered identical (Colville and Pye, 2010). The metaphor was also picked up by a wider group of researchers with the pictorial elements of the research appealing to a larger group who then extended the metaphor to include a larger group of constructs such as: network horizon; directionality, power; time; task; environment; focus; actors; activities; resources; central; periphery (Henneberg et al., 2004).

The idea of network pictures being a representation of higher order constructs was muted by Henneberg et al. (2004) and developed further to include sense-making, cognition and mental schema. Network pictures are described as network insight (Mouzas et al., 2008). This further progression still focuses on network pictures as objectifying subjective knowledge that allows managers to act and strategise within a network context. Mouzas et al. (2008) also extend the picture metaphor to describe it as pictures undergoing a process of continual re-configuration, yet still present pictures as cross-sectional timeslots. This may be an example of the ‘picture’ aspect of the metaphor limiting theoretical development in new directions such as a focus on how re-configuration emerges from subjective processes. Henneberg et al. (2010) highlight that network pictures ‘circumscribe’ the managers cognitive map – thus defining the managers frame of reference for their cognitive understanding of the business network in which they are operating.

The network picture metaphor also has been extended in the direction of using network pictures as a tool for conducting research (Ramos and Ford, 2011). This avenue is relatively recent with the researchers taking theoretical development in a deterministic direction of further simplifying the theoretical constructs. This research clusters the network picture descriptions into four broad research foci: focus; weight; specificity/ coherence; and overall view of surroundings.

Although the above two paragraphs highlight important developments in the theoretical development of how to consider network pictures, during the same time period others began to question the direction of theory development through the network pictures metaphor. Leek and Mason (2010) found that in their research network pictures had the following aspects which needed further development:

- network pictures lack that ability to transfer rich subjective information;

- ability to portray atmosphere is lacking although it plays an important role in managerial decision making; and
- managers' pictures have minimal overlap between managers within the same organization – let alone between managers from different organizations.

The above results highlight that the network pictures metaphor needs further examination in order to extend the metaphor further to allow new ideas of thought to develop. Geiger and Finch (2010) categorised the research into three broad categories for theoretical development: representationalist; mentalist and map metaphor. This paper further extends their categories to include a movies metaphor (Purchase et al., 2010). Each of the categories are now analysed for their metaphoric transfer aspects as per Hunt and Menon (1985), as shown in table 1.

< Insert table 2 around here >

Table 2 outlines the main metaphors used within the pictures agenda of IMP discourse. The table outlines the main metaphorical used and the variants that have been suggested such as the inclusion of actor network theory and the development into a more processual approach to the network pictures agenda. Both representationalist and mentalist pictures involve snapshots in time that focus on stability and order. The representationalist pictures focus on managerial problems and how such pictures can improve managerial approaches to strategizing in networks (Ford et al., 2003; Ford and Redwood, 2005). Ford et al. (2003) outline how network pictures can be used for developing three network strategies and thus focus on using the picture metaphor for control and planning. The metaphoric transfer capacity of representationalist network pictures is limited to managerial actions and will not develop rich and depth theory generation that include the nuances of different managerial sensemaking approaches. This lack of theory generation is because within this approach the network pictures are used to describe the main connections within the focal network and aim at presentation and simplification of the focal network in question. Due to these limitations the mentalist approach to network pictures developed to consider how network pictures can be used more for theory generation and improve our understanding of the mental maps of business managers.

Mentalist picture agenda follows a cognitive mapping approach by highlighting that networks are more about interaction and practice. This next stage moved from individualist network pictures (Ford et al., 2003) towards objective network pictures on the assumption that each manager within the organisation would have a similar picture and therefore an organisation's network picture can be determined by the research from each individual's idiosyncratic picture (Henneberg et al., 2006). This 'objective' picture developed by the research has implications in their assumption that the objective picture defines the cognitive network map of the organisation (Henneberg et al., 2010) where they introduce boundaries between the network and the environment (Colville and Pye 2010). Leek and Mason (2010) highlight that managers do not have similar network pictures leading to the implication that an objective network picture does not exist. The implications for this is that within the mentalist agenda pictorial measurement of constructs (such as network horizon, directionality, power etc) do not improve our understanding of business networks as a single amalgamated picture does not exist – even within an organisation. Therefore, comparison of picture across industries,

organisation, etc will hold little relevance as all individual actors are working off different foundation signs and the interpretant is not common across actors (interpreters).

Network pictures as actants, builds on the prior work and extends the concepts through the idea that network pictures are performative and interaction processes are critical to the concept of actor networks (Geiger and Finch, 2010). Geiger and Finch (2010, p. 382) argue that the current agenda on network pictures ‘distract(s) attention from dynamics and from the multiple perspectives implied in an industrial context’. These researchers extend the metaphor from a picture metaphor to a map metaphor. Yet, maps are symbols rather than signified territory and therefore cannot be considered the objectified ‘map’ for managers can follow to organise within their business networks (Baudrillard, 1993). Therefore, maps become representations rather than ‘reality’ and are increasingly separated within the images portrayed in within our modern networked lifestyle. Using the map metaphor as the signified territory or truth leads to an emphasis on trying to portray business networks as objectified realities rather than subjective acts of fiction.

The network movie metaphor extends the picture metaphor into another direction – that of the cinema to incorporate complexity, change and fiction (Purchase et al., 2010). Colville and Pye (2010) highlight that theory developed through the network picture metaphor disregards interaction as process and thus fails to incorporate the dynamic changes that are inevitable within an industrial context. They argue that the network picture is an ‘output of an enacted sensemaking process’ (Colville and Pye 2010, p. 376). The network movies metaphor allows theory development to incorporate: complexity; differences in meanings between actors; change processes and self generation; operate within multiple realities; and include reflection and interpretation of interactions (Purchase et al., 2010). It is argued that the metaphoric transfer of the network movies metaphor will take theory development in the area of subjective meanings and understandings and incorporate the managers own sense making interpretations. Network movies also have the ability to incorporate subjective meanings such as relationship atmosphere which Leek and Mason (2010) highlight need to be included due to their importance in interpreting network processes. The network movie metaphor allows researchers to incorporate each managers idiosyncratic network picture for which there may be no similarities with others (Leek and Mason 2010) – highlighting that subjectivity rather than objectivity needs further inclusion within the metaphor to ensure that objective approaches to network picture development are not privileged when compared to the development of subjective approaches to business network theoretical development.

This section highlights that a network pictures metaphor has allowed theoretical development within the area of managerial strategy development within business network contexts. In particular, the inclusion of cognitive elements and sense making within the IMP literature emerged as important considerations for theory development. Another advantage of the early network picture metaphor is discourse around the constructs that managers used within their network pictures (Henneberg et al., 2006). Although many interesting and important ideas were developed from the network picture metaphor there are limits to theory development

through the limitations of metaphor transfer from a pictures metaphor. We argue that a movies metaphor allows for broader and richer theory generation.

After highlighting the background to the network pictures discourse, what could the movie metaphor bring further for theoretical development around the network pictures agenda? The initial focus would be that the movie metaphor could raise interesting and different research questions as it would introduce different interpretant thought processes within the academic actors (interpreters). The movie metaphor introduces sequencing, time, importance of history, differences of interpretation and fulfilment to name a few. Different research questions would be raised that may or may not add to new approaches for considering how signs influence business managers behaviour within networks. For example:

- How do dynamic chains of signification develop into sequences?
- How do actors (interpreters of signs) interpret and behave when influenced by (a) iconic, (b) indexical and (c) symbolic signs within their business networks?
- How do the interlinking of signs influence a managers behaviour within their business relationships?
- How do actors (interpreters of signs) produce different interpretants within distributed chains of signification?
- How do managers use different signs ((a) iconic, (b) indexical and (c) symbolic) when developing and presenting their identity and their organisation's identity?

The next section discusses how IMP researchers can include the network movie within their current research practices. The proposed methodological approaches allow inclusion of an individual actor's framing processes and subjective realities which are more likely to build on the strengths that the network movie metaphor allows.

Discourse and Texts: Picture Acquisition, Exchange and Borrowing

The methodology of discourse analysis (DA) is useful to marketing researchers since it can liberate the non-rational and subjective ways in which networks are constructed by their participants. In addressing linguistic and social issues by linking text and context, it asks how and why language-based negotiations over meaning are attempted. In particular, in exploring the concept of what is known as 'intertextuality', DA attempts to capture the property that written and spoken texts have of containing segments of other texts, which the texts under study may boldly echo, subtly assimilate or sometimes contradict (Fairclough 1992). In exploring intertextuality as particular terms are exchanged between 'textbook' discourse and managers' talk, DA can show how theories can have a potentially performative effect (Mattsson 2005). This is because participants' intertextual pictures (as manifest in manager's talk) can form basis for action, and hence possess a performative, or productive, capacity.

An adoption of DA as a response to taking language seriously (Lowe et al, 2008) within the IMP promises theoretical advances and practical benefits. In theoretical terms it can help show interaction as a communicative accomplishment of meaning and in practical terms, it can help managers to improve communication, interaction, relationships and 'atmospheres' to enhance activities and resources. Indeed, for Phillips et al. (2004:640), "the discursive realm acts as the background against which current actions occur—enabling some actions and constraining others". Improved understanding of network actors comes from listening to their semiotic, pictured world displayed through discourse.

DA emphasises the holistic, constitutive role of language and communication in configuring knowledge and power and ‘framing’ pictured realities as socially constructed through interaction. In these processes people invent their fictional worlds and often legitimise these pictures by calling them ‘commonsensical’ and ‘real’. There is quite a difference between how people invent their world and interaction is not least about settling such differences through negotiation, ‘conceptual courtship’, ‘business dancing’, ‘fencing with truth claims’ or by imposition of power. Surprising behaviour, such as ‘ventriliquising’ (Tannen, 2010) gets noticed when the focus moves to abduction processes in interaction. Actors can and do mimic or use the identity of other actor-characters to accomplish a scene, just as a father when trying to get his child to eat green vegetables can invoke the authoritative voice of ‘mummy’, his wife. In business networks, such mimicking or picture borrowing also occurs when for example, industry heroes or ‘icons’ are invoked by actors to support a particular policy, proposal or argument. DA reports on accounting for constructed symbolic networks of identities and ideas over time. The concern is to understand how these accounts as contested attributions transmitted carefully, mostly indirectly and, imaginatively, following both conventional cultural scripts and inventively weaving new ‘webs of significance’ (Geertz, 1973).

Two areas of theoretical and practical advancement that DA explores that are especially germane to the metaphor-based approach we discuss in this paper are intertextuality (involving analogical reasoning/tropes) and narratives /storytelling. These principal issues following the ‘linguistic turn’ thus form the main areas of focus for the rest of this paper.

Intertextuality: The awesome indexicality of picturing indirectly

When meaning is exchanged in interaction, much of this exchange involves indirectness (Tannen, 2009). Communication of entailments of meaning involves ‘abduction’, involving meaning transfer through analogy and symbolic connotation. Humans identify other humans, objects and any other phenomena according to ‘what they are like’ and this ubiquitous likening is based on a history of comparison and association within the speech community. Tannen (2009) suggests that notions such as Bateson’s (1979) ‘abduction’, Freidrich’s (1991) ‘polytropy’, Becker’s (1995) ‘prior text’ in languaging and Bakhtin’s (1986) ‘dialogicality’ are all conceptualisations of intertextuality. Intertextuality, therefore, involves the pervasive discursive practice of picturing through indirectness in interaction or picturing by comparison and accomplishing meaning by association. Tannen (2009:4) explains that “For all these language theorists, the meaning speakers convey or glean from words in interaction derives from how those words have been previously used. Because this meaning is communicated implicitly rather than explicitly, it is indirect”. The implication is that people through interaction invent or frame their present and future pictures of reality by reference to the framed fictional invented pictures of the past. In other words meaning in interaction arises in semiotic terms between differences in signifiers and is based upon highly tacit, commonsensical, historically and culturally dependent meanings carried through time in discourses and indirectly in interaction.

Returning to our opening discussion of tropes, there is some tension between the cognitive linguists, such as Lakoff & Johnson (1980) who see tropes and particularly metaphor as constitutive of meaning and the ‘sociocultural’ anthropological approach to tropes (Freidrich,

1991, Quinn, 1991, Alverson, 1991) who view tropes as largely an expression of cultural values. Freidrich's (1991) 'intertextual' view is that tropes as figures of speech are pervasive, used in imaginative combination through the play of tropes or 'polytropy' and culturally determined. As a result, the emphasis of this sociocultural approach has been "more on the entirety of the tropes in dynamic relation as a congeries of figures with predicative and performative possibilities" (Fernandez, 1991:7). The sociocultural exploration of metaphor has led to emphasis "on the one hand of the diversity of tropes and, on the other hand, of the transformative interaction of the various subtropes" (Fernandez 1991: 6). The study of polytropy concerns the dynamics of this creative interaction between the panoply of tropes and is consistent with a 'moving picture' metaphor of tropes. This agenda is concerned with probing the cultural embeddedness of discourse and seeks to extend understanding of discourse and analogical reasoning beyond the so-called master trope of metaphor. The outcomes of such an agenda are to recognise metaphor as an equally dynamic and creative contributor, along with the many other tropes with their interstitial and transformative quality, to enactment of established cultural worlds (Fernandez, 1991). In particular, this means that these anthropological approaches to metaphor uncover a realisation that "cultural worlds are brought into being by the performance (enactment) of mixed metaphors (Fernandez 1991: 12). In support of this, Quinn (1991) proposes to demonstrate that culture occupies a central organising role in human thought and her agenda is to rescue culture from the peripheral and epiphenomenal importance afforded it by Johnson, Lakoff and other cognitive linguists. Quinn argues that "metaphors, far from constituting understanding, are ordinarily selected to fit a pre-existing and culturally shared model" and "do not typically give rise to new, previously unrecognised entailments" (Quinn 1991:60). This assertion is consonant with the view that tropes operate largely within a "cognitive comfort zone" (Oswick, Keenoy and Grant 2002, 1).

Whether it is the cognitive linguistic or socio-cultural approach used, tropes are clearly important in B2B pictured interaction. In particular tropes provide the ingredients for rhetorical codes that largely configure nominalist connotations of the creative imagination, the entirety of human relational epistemes and, consequently, social constructions of reality and sensemaking. This importance has not been recognised so far in IMP research and we strongly recommend that this should be remedied by accelerating (to use a speed metaphor) an agenda that 'takes language seriously' (Lowe et al. 2008). Tropes are the principal focus for understanding the intertextuality of meaning and the role of discourse in pictured interaction. In 'languaging' (Becker, 1995) past contexts drawing upon 'prior texts' including tropal figurations are reshaped and reformulated into present 'dialogicity' (Bakhtin, 1986). In other words, current pictures are in dialogue with previous fictions and most of the discursive processes involved are subtly indirect, indexical and involve allusion, connotation and intertextuality.

The text is thus always under the 'jurisdiction' of previous discourses (Kristeva, 1980). The author may have influence in anchoring meanings but these are highly dependent on combinations of other authors and the meaning is interpreted by the receiver who also brings her prior readings to the interpretation. As a result Barthes (1977) announced the 'death of the author' in contemporary 'semiospheres' or picture environments, which moves the focus of meaning from its production and to its interpretation by audiences. This requires researchers and managers to sensitise themselves to the importance of analogical reasoning in the social construction of reality, the indeterminacy of meaning and the enactments of sensemaking. From, for example, the perspective of 'pictures' in business networks, it affords the realisations that pictures are made of signifiers and mostly of words that carry a history of

meanings, figurative language games and dynamic images and that these are mostly indirectly communicated, tacit, interconnected or ‘panrelational’, unmanageable and culturally embedded. What emerges as the ephemeral ‘truth’ is, from this perspective, the product of a history of labyrinthal fictions. As the recognised leading Piercian semiotic theorist Thomas Sebeok’s work emphasise how all living things sign through use of moving pictures. Sebeok stresses that all living things occupy their *umwelten* (subjective pictured environments that they choose to recognise and operate within). Picturing from this contemporary form of Piercian semiotics involves life’s perfusion of signs that include natural and cultural (verbal and non-verbal). The point about Sebeok’s ‘bio-semiotics’ is that not all pictures are traded. Living things choose the pictures they want to trade and language is a relatively sophisticated form of picturing that serves as a modelling device for action within human *umwelten* (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2001). From the point of view of this paper, the vast ‘representamen’ of moving pictures used by actors are not just linguistic, they are also non-verbal and natural moving pictures. They also vary to the extent that they involve signification or communication (signification that involves dialogue, recognition/exchange of meaning and understanding).

The effective networker operating in this vast ‘representamen’, therefore, must know in practice how to say and do the ‘right thing’, to act in the ‘right way’ at the right time. She must know how word pictures, body language, ideational pictures and pictures of relationships are going to ‘play out’ to audiences. This involves skilful picturing in context, appropriately indirectly and within the confines of ‘political correctness’, balancing truthfulness with lying, deception and the afforded ‘artistic license’ of exaggeration, balancing familiarity with novelty, floating appropriate connotations and drawing upon networks of figures of speech that resonate within the network. She must, in other words, acquire the adequate *habitus* to be an accomplished rhetorical communicator and picture maker. She must be able to ‘spin’ and maintain a credible imagery to create a favourable ‘web of significance’ as well as be competent in the rhetoric of scientific management, denotative precision and putative analytical objectivity.

Narratives and Storytelling: How to make credible pictures

Managers working within business networks are engaged in a process of the production and consumption of images/ pictures and this, therefore, involves them as “communicative subjects” (Firat and Venkatesh 1995, p.243) involved in the construction of cultural knowledge through language and discourse. The imagery generated (produced and consumed) from discourse largely concerns the perceived qualities of reputation and identities ascribed to all network actors. It is important to add narrative to our discourse ‘toolkit’ because narrative is the most rudimentary and ubiquitous form of picture transmission and reception. In terms of Pierce’s triadic model, it would be impossible to move from the firstness of perception to the thirdness of rationalisation without narrative and storytelling. Narratives involve syntagm (logically ordered sequences of signs) to depict events. Stories involve narrative plus plot. The plot attributes meaning to what happened/ is happening or is going to happen. Plots to be effective often rely upon the poetics of tropes and particularly metaphor. So in picturing the world, there are repertoires of making pictures and making them move by using narrative, plots, stories metaphors and figurative language. By implication, the effective networker must be a consummate ‘picture maker’ and to do so must she have competences in narrative, emplotment and storytelling and figuration in more than one repertoire.

David Boje (2008) applies conceptualisations from complexity theory to narrative and story. His view is that contemporary sensemaking is a battle between centripetal ‘meta-narratives’ that afford control, order and continuity and more local stories that are diffusive, decentering and ‘centrifugal’. In Boje’s (2008) complex scheme narrativity differs temporally between past present and future but these tales are all interconnected and co-determined. These temporalities are in turn inter-related with moral-ethical identity narratives such as Ricoeur’s (1983-4) ‘dialectics’ and Bakhtin’s (1981) transcendental ‘dialogic’ imagination of multiplicities of text, style, genre, repertoires etc. Boje’s complexity approach is oriented to the “dance of diverse logics and languages of sensemaking” (2008, p.5) that suggests complexity levels beyond even the first and second order complexities (Tsoukas & Hatch) IMP researchers have become familiar with. Perhaps at this stage an acceptable way of emplotting Boje’s approach is as ‘third order complexity’. It is effectively an approach that converts ‘the general framework for the analysis of business networks in a contextual time-space’ of Halinen & Törnroos (2005) into a complexity model. In Boje’s (2008) complex narrativity, actors do not belong to a single bounded ‘culture’ but associate themselves with multiple cultural stages simultaneously through the flexible and strategic expression of identity using kaleidoscopic moving pictures. Boje’s (1995, 2001) *Tamara* manifesto is a dramatic evocation of the processual and relativist realities appropriate for understanding networks as complex dramaturgical narratives and moving, talking pictures. ‘Tamara’ is a complexity / drama metaphor. It is a multi-staged dramaturgical context involving mobile actors and audiences, both involved in production and consumption of meaning. Narratives emerge according to the context of which stages are being watched in what sequence by different audiences and from the outcome of actor improvisations and audience reactions. This ‘holographic surfing’ approach differs markedly from the inclinations of Halinen & Törnroos (2005, p.1290) who are oriented to “mastering complexity” in order not to lose it’s “inherent nature”.

Viewing organisational phenomena as complex discursive constructions from this perspective, involves the acceptance of multiple narratives and appreciation that discourses change depending on network position. Kornberger et al. (2006: 20) highlight that such polyphonic discourse “constitutes organizational reality” and that all narratives expose contextualities even though this will create multiple different perspectives and applications of how to interpret plots. Such tension or ‘différend’ brings out the conflicts or paradoxes that emerge through multiple narratives. Embracing the ‘linguistic turn’ in this way means not privileging optimal or ‘conclusive’ solutions but including all narratives as possible valid pictures without automatically rejecting any perspectives. In other words, this requires not simply ignoring or rejecting narratives that do not conform to the researcher’s preconceptions, presiding fictions or unswerving pictures of reality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the metaphor, ‘network pictures’ has developed a rich research agenda. Contributions to the IMP discourse include: sense-making; further promotion of cognition; new research devices for investigating business networks and the simplification of higher order constructs. This paper proposes that a network movies metaphor will allow further development of the creative theoretical developments that are yet to emerge. The network movies metaphor enables researchers to incorporate the criticisms of Leek and Mason (2010) and Colville and Pye (2010) while allowing for subjective development of the pictures

agenda. Our contribution to this research area is achieved by discursively analysing the dimensions of metaphoric transfer in the various network picture metaphors with a view to illustrating how IMP researchers, through the inclusion of an individual actor's framing processes and subjective realities, can include the network movie within their current research practices.

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Table 2 Metaphoric Transfer within the IMP ‘pictures’ agenda

Pictures Metaphor	Source	Ontology	concepts	Theory	Values	Methodological Approaches
Network pictures (representationalist) (Ford et al., 2003; Ford and Redwood, 2005)	Art/ Photography	Metaphysics of substance	Representation; simplification	‘Network representations’	Static, actors, connection, stability, order, objective	Description
Network pictures (Mentalist) (Henneberg et al., 2006; Mouzas et al., 2008; Corsaro et al., 2010; Ramos et al., 2010)	Art/ Photography	Metaphysics of substance	Cognitive	‘Network insight’	Static, understandings, environment, stability, order, objective	Cognitive mapping; Non-parametric testing; Regression
Network pictures (situated – actants) (Geiger and Finch, 2010)	Geography/ maps	Relativism	Mapping as an activity,	Actor Network Theory	Instability at edges, symbols, signifiers, topography, subjective	Referential reflexive mapping
Network Movies (Purchase et al., 2010)	Art/ Cinema	Metaphysics of process	Story, Frames & framing	Identity processes; Communication processes	Dynamics, drama, process, images, subjective, self generation, time & space, subjective	Discourse Analysis, Dramaturgy, Action Research

Table 1 Application of Pierce's Triadic Theory to well known IMP metaphors

	Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh (1987)	Wilkinson & Young (1994)	Alajoutsijarvi, Eriksson & Tikkanen (2001)	Stoltman & Morgan (2002)	Johnston & Hausman (2006)	Celuch, Bantham & Kasouf (2006)	
Representamen	Marriage metaphor to relationship stages	Dancing metaphor in relation to relationship type	Network as a marriage	Marriage metaphor (organisational level)	Marriage metaphor (organisational level)	Marriage metaphor (individual dyadic level)	
Interpretant		Character of dance	Closeness, long-term stability yet dynamic, mutuality, intimacy, affection, trust, commitment	Attributes of the relationship, relationship type, assessment and relationship management, change and future trajectories	Relationship stages and the impact of extended family	Relationship satisfaction, investment, Business outcomes, communication & communicating behaviour	
Object		Business relationship type	relationships	Business relationships	Business relationship embedded within a network	Business relationships	