# METAPHOR RESISTANCE WITHIN BUSINESS MEDIA DISCOURSE

**Dovbnya O. Yu.**

*Postgraduate Student at the Department of Translation*
*Kremenchuk Mykhailo Ostrohradskyi National University*
*Pershotravneva str., 20, Kremenchuk, Poltava region, Ukraine*
*orcid.org/0000-0002-8720-5986*
*amorris41@yahoo.com*

**Chrdileli T. V.**

*Candidate of Philological Sciences,*
*Associate Professor at the Department of Translation*
*Kremenchuk Mykhailo Ostrohradskyi National University*
*Pershotravneva str., 20, Kremenchuk, Poltava region, Ukraine*
*orcid.org/0000-0002-8257-9911*
*tat.chrdileli@gmail.com*

This paper has examined the instances of metaphor resistance that can be observed in business media discourse. It defines the term "metaphor resistance" and provides a detailed review of existing research on the topic, which includes the findings of leading linguists such as Raymond Gibbs. After analyzing the posts of the social network X (formerly Twitter), various cases of resistance were identified. It can be expressed both by users of the social network who consume the content of business media and media persons, and by business media outlets themselves. The paper has taken an in-depth look at different types of resistance (propositional, locutionary, personal and situational). The conducted analysis suggests that the propositional type of resistance is the most prevalent one in the given type of discourse, accounting for 45.45% of all cases. Consumers of media content, as well as business media themselves, may criticize metaphorical expressions due to them being illogical, irrelevant, or factually incorrect. The study also demonstrates that locutionary resistance can arise from possible attempts at market manipulation by using overly intense metaphors with such source domains as "NATURAL DISASTER", "RELIGION", etc. This type of metaphor resistance demonstrates the manipulative function of metaphor in business media discourse. Locutionary resistance is also observed when the verbalization of a metaphorical expression is tactless and unacceptable to some consumers of business media. Personal resistance to a metaphorical expression arises when the person using it is accused of hypocrisy, bias, etc. At the same time, situational resistance occurs when the metaphorical expression is insensitive to the sociocultural or sociopolitical context. For example, in the US, there may be resistance to "WEAPONS" source domain metaphors in relation to the gun violence crisis. The relevance of the research effort is determined by the fact that resistance has been studied for the first time within the framework of business media discourse. Before that, this linguistic phenomenon was studied in medical and political discourse.

# МЕТАФОРИЧНА РЕЗИСТЕНТНІСТЬ У БІЗНЕС-МЕДІАДИСКУРСІ

**Довбня О. Ю.**
*аспірант кафедри перекладу*
*Кременчуцький національний університет*
*імені Михайла Остроградського*
*вул. Першотравнева, 20, Кременчук, Полтавська область, Україна*
*orcid.org/0000-0002-8720-5986*
*amorris41@yahoo.com*

**Чрділелі Т. В.**
*кандидат філологічних наук,*
*доцент кафедри перекладу*
*Кременчуцький національний університет*
*імені Михайла Остроградського*
*вул. Першотравнева, 20, Кременчук, Полтавська область, Україна*
*orcid.org/0000-0002-8257-9911*
*tat.chrdileli@gmail.com*

У цій лінгвістичній розвідці вивчається резистенція стосовно метафор, які вживаються у дискурсі бізнес-медіа. У ній наведено визначення терміна «метафорична резистенція», а також проведено детальний огляд наявних досліджень з цієї теми, які включають роботи провідних лінгвістів, зокрема Реймонда Гіббза. У процесі аналізу постів соціальної мережі Х (раніше Twitter) було визначено різноманітні випадки резистенції. Вона може виражатися як користувачами соціальних мереж, які споживають контент бізнес-медіа та медійних персон, так і самими бізнес-медіа. У цьому дослідженні детально розглядаються різні типи резистенції (пропозиційна, локуційна, персональна та ситуативна). Проведений аналіз дозволяє припустити, що пропозиційний тип резистенції є найбільш поширеним (45,45%). Споживачі медіаконтенту, а також самі бізнес-медіа можуть критикувати метафоричні вирази через їх нелогічність, нерелевантність, а також наявність фактичних помилок. Дослідження також демонструє, що локуційна резистентність може виникати через можливі спроби маніпуляцій ринком за допомогою занадто інтенсивних метафор з такими доменами-джерелами, як «NATURAL DISASTER», «RELIGION» тощо. Випадки прояву цього виду резистентності демонструють маніпулятивну функцію метафори у дискурсі бізнес-медіа. Локуційна резистентність також проявляється, коли вербалізація метафоричного виразу є нетактовною та неприйнятною для деяких споживачів бізнес-медіа. Персональна резистентність до метафоричного виразу виникає, коли той, хто його вживає, звинувачується у лицемірстві, предвзятості тощо. Водночас ситуативна резистентність проявляється, коли метафоричний вираз є нечутливим стосовно соціокультурного чи соціополітичного контексту. Наприклад, у США може виникати резистеність до метафор з доменом-джерелом WEAPONS у зв'язку з кризою насильства із застосуванням вогнепальної зброї. Актуальність дослідження зумовлюється тим, що вперше була досліджена резистенція у рамках бізнес-медіадискурсу. До цього цей лінгвістичний феномен вивчали у медичному та політичному дискурсі.

**Introduction.** Metaphors are a pervasive figure of speech that shapes different aspects of human discourse. According to G. Lakoff, the human conceptual system is largely metaphorical, which means that metaphors define the way people think [Lakoff, 1980, p. 195]. However, metaphors are not always accepted by discourse participants.

Metaphor resistance recently emerged as a novel research avenue in metaphorical studies. According to the definition offered by L. van Poppel and R. Pilgram, metaphor resistance is "understood as the individual, explicit utterance of non-acceptance or criticism of the interlocutor's metaphor use" [van Poppel & Pilgram, 2023, p. 313]. As noted by prominent linguist and psychologist R. Gibbs, metaphors are typically rejected by discourse participants due to being meaningless, incoherent, offensive, stigmatizing and so on [Gibbs & Siman, 2021, p. 670].

Metaphor resistance is not a new phenomenon, with some prominent philosophers categorically rejecting this figure of speech. For instance, English philosopher Thomas Hobbes viewed metaphors as "a threat to accurate judgement and reason", advocating for preserving the proper meaning [Feldman, 2001, p. 21]. Francis Bacon and John Locke, two other prominent British empiricists, were also very hostile toward the idea of using metaphors in scientific and philosophical writing [Forrester, 2010, p. 610].

Metaphor resistance may vary depending on the specific source domains that are involved in the process of metaphorization. The war metaphor, for instance, frequently becomes the target of criticism in different types of discourse (from healthcare to business). For example, in his Harvard Business Review publication, F. V. Cespedes argues that companies should stop using battle metaphors in their strategies since business is about customer value, not defeating an enemy [Cespedes, 2014]. M. Dolores Porto has also described different cases of metaphor resistance in such discourses as healthcare, climate, and teaching. According to the researcher, studying how and why metaphors can be resisted is vital for understanding metaphorical thinking in general [Romano, 2024, p. 177–206].

Metaphor awareness can lead to metaphor resistance, and individuals might want to attempt to reframe a certain issue (case in point: the #ReframeCovid social media initiative, which was supposed to find alternative metaphorical frames for the global COVID-19 pandemic) [Olza et al., 2021, p. 98]. However, replacing metaphors might be challenging regardless of their inaptness due to a high level of entrenchment.

An incorrect choice of metaphors for framing a particular issue might actually prompt audiences to adopt the opposite point of view. A recent study by C. Hart determined that the usage of extreme dehumanizing metaphors from such domains as "ANIMALS" for shaping the immigration discourse could actually dampen anti-immigration sentiment since immigrants would be viewed with more sympathy [Hart, 2020, p. 226]. Hence, those who advocate for restricting immigration might want to stick to literal framing.

K.Y. Renardel de Lavalette, who has studied the argumentative function of metaphors, explored how politicians show resistance to metaphors used by their opponents. The researcher described the ability to resist metaphors as a "pertinent skill" in political debates [Renardel de Lavalette, Andone, & Steen, 2019, p. 718].

L. van Poppel and R. Pilgram have singled out such types of metaphor resistance as propositional, locutional, personal, and contextual. The propositional type of resistance is focused on the material premise of the metaphor, meaning that it covers cases when metaphors are criticized for being illogical or factually incorrect. The locutional type of resistance occurs when a metaphor is distasteful or inappropriate. The personal resistance, as the term implies, is directed at the person using the metaphor. Finally, situational resistance means that a metaphorical expression is not appropriate in a certain social or political context [van Poppel & Pilgram, 2023, p. 315]. The classification proposed by the researchers serves as the basis for this paper.

**The aim** of this paper is to explore different types of metaphor resistance in business discourse of social media. **The object** of the paper is social media responses to business media outlets. The **subject of the study** is the metaphorical resistance expressed in social media posts by those who consume business media and by business media itself.

The **significance of the topic** stems from the fact that social media interactions have become an indispensable part of business media discourse. Social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) allow users to react to business news as well as statements made by analysts, business leaders, and influencers in real time. Since social media can be viewed as some sort of a public forum, they make it possible to explore audience participation in different types of discourse, including business media discourse.

Business media discourse is shaped by unique factors such as economic interests, investor behavior and so on. Metaphors that are used within business media discourse can potentially influence investor sentiment and even cause market volatility. Business media outlets as well as media personalities should be aware of potential pitfalls that are associated with the usage of inappropriate metaphors that might evoke resistance from their audiences.

The **novelty** of this research effort stems from the fact that metaphor resistance has been explored within business media discourse for the first time. The study

fills a gap by examining cases of resistance specifically within this type of media discourse. The paper aims to contribute to the broader fields of cognitive linguistics as well as communication theory. It is supposed to enrich the existing theoretical framework for business linguistics and business media discourse.

The **hypothesis** is that propositional resistance is the most common type. This is due to the fact that metaphors used by media outlets or prominent business personalities tend to attract factual and logical scrutiny from audiences.

**Research methods.** The study relies on qualitative content analysis, a research method that makes it possible to measure the presence and frequency of metaphor resistance in tweets. The method was chosen due to its ability to identify and interpret specific patterns within textual data.

For the purpose of this study, the term "metaphor" was used to search for replies to tweets posted by prominent business media outlets (*The Wall Street Journal, Bloomberg, CNBC*) as well as statements made by some prominent business media personalities. A corpus with specific tweets was compiled based on such criteria as clear presence of metaphoric language and relevance to business media discourse. Each tweet was manually reviewed in order to determine whether or not it contains metaphoric language based on the metaphor identification procedure (MIP) proposed by the Pragglejaz group [Group P. MIP, 2007, p. 1]. The underlying cognitive and linguistic structures of identified metaphors were then examined with the help of conceptual analysis. The study also touches upon cognitive implications as well as cultural significance of metaphors with some specific source domains.

After this, the metaphors were grouped according to different types of resistance based on L. van Poppel and R. Pilgram's framework. Frequency analysis was used for each specific type of metaphor resistance that was discovered in the sample of tweets. Contextual analysis was used for determining the conditions that prompted a specific act of resistance in each discourse situation.

**Results and discussion**
**Propositional resistance**

Propositional resistance tends to occur when a certain metaphor is flawed due to being illogical, factually incorrect, irrelevant, etc. As the term suggests, the criticism is aimed at the proposition of a metaphorical expression. It has been determined that the propositional type of resistance tends to be the most common type of metaphor resistance in business media discourse based on the analyzed examples.

In Example 1, the propositional type of resistance was caused by the fact that a Twitter user disagrees with the material premise of the metaphor since they find it factually incorrect. *The Wall Street Journal (WSJ)* outlet claims that higher mortgage rates are "adding pressure to a fast-cooling housing market".

However, the user has pointed out that temperature tends to increase with pressure since it is proportional to the average kinetic energy of molecules. Hence, the metaphor does not make sense in the given example.

(1)...*I thought everybody knows that increased pressure = increased temperature. I'm all for a physics metaphor, but get it right!*

Source: https://x.com/nbashaw/status/1562804201310208002

In Example 2, the same type of resistance is applied to another metaphor used by the *WSJ*. The outlet claimed that students should be treated as clients. However, a Twitter user resisted the premise of the metaphor, arguing that education is not a commodity, and students should be treated as shareholders.

(2) *Education is not a commodity. If you must have a business metaphor, the one you are looking for is shareholders*

Source: https://x.com/Lee__Drake/status/866460397557227520

In Example 3, *The Financial Times* quoted business executives working in Hong Kong during massive anti-government protests in 2020. The executives compared China's national security law to "bitter medicine with terrible side effects". However, the premise of the metaphor is being rejected by a Twitter user due to the fact that medicine, regardless of how bitter it is, serves as a cure. The user argues that policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) should be framed as "poison" for Hong Kong's business environment.

(3) *Your 'medicine' metaphor is wrong. This is not like "bitter medicine",*
*– medicine is ultimately a cure – this is the equivalent of Chinese communism poison for the people of HK #StandWithHongKong #HKProtests*

Source: https://x.com/SwissTony32/status/1266075404915183616

In Example 4, a Twitter user took issue with the "soft landing" metaphor that has become deeply entrenched in business media discourse. The metaphor is used to denote a scenario in which the U.S. Federal Reserve would manage to bring down inflation to the 2% target without causing a dramatic recession. This sort of metaphorical framing often attracts criticism since some find it to be erroneous. In the example below, the user claims that they dislike the soft landing metaphor since the word "landing" implies the finalization of an activity (an airplane reaching its gate, a gymnast ending its routine and so on). However, the economy does not stop functioning due to the Fed's actions.

(4) *I dislike the "soft landing" metaphor for this reason. An airplane reaches its gate, or a gymnast ends a floor routine, and it's over. The landing is the end of the activity. But the economy never really stops.*

Source: https://x.com/ryanjamesboyle/status/1570432920841785350

In Example 5, *The Economist*, one of the top business news magazines, displayed resistance toward the "housing ladder" metaphor that gets frequently employed by British politicians across the political spectrum. The media outlet argues that such a metaphor no longer makes sense in 2024 due to the British housing market experiencing dramatic changes since the early 2000s. They pointed to the fact that housing ownership rates in the UK reached their peak two decades ago. Hence, the premise of the "housing ladder" got rejected since it is no longer relevant.

(5) *Britain's "housing ladder" actually died two decades ago but its allure as a metaphor remains. That continues to blind politicians and voters to the reality of the property market.*

Source: https://x.com/TheEconomist/status/1746433809623417151

**Locutional resistance**

A locution, which is viewed as the collective meaning that is contained within an utterance, is meant to express the propositional content of a particular metaphor. Hence, locutional resistance takes issue with the way in which a metaphor has been verbalized instead of its material premise.

In Example 6, a Twitter user criticized prominent American hedge fund manager Bill Ackman for using such strong terms as "hell" and "tsunami" when warning about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the US economy. Such strong terms prompted the user to accuse Ackman of trying to manipulate the market with "fear mongering". The verbalization of the metaphor was too intense for some *CNBC* audiences. In this particular case, Ackman and the user who resisted his metaphors might be on different sides of the trade. Metaphors are believed to have a significantly stronger emotional impact compared to non-metaphoric statements, according to empirical evidence [Mohammad, Shutova, & Turney, 2016, p. 23]. Hence, apparent attempts to use over-the-top means of verbalization for certain metaphors that could influence investor sentiment in one way or another are likely to produce strong locutional resistance.

(6) *Fear mongering from one of wall street's biggest shorts. Shame on you for having him on to intensify the panic*

Source: https://x.com/everythingdale/status/1240365751506092032

In Example 7, locutional resistance is expressed due to how insensitive and jarring the metaphor is. Famous *CNBC* host Jim Cramer compared the impact of potential buyers of the Beyond Meat (BYND) stock on short-sellers (bears) to a trailer tractor rolling over a squirrel. In this case, a Twitter user took issue with the inappropriateness of verbalization. Business media personalities of the likes of Cramer, who might want to come up with colorful metaphors for describing metaphorical volatility, sometimes might go too far, which subsequently triggers cases of resistance.

(7) *I think that, beyond the terribleness of this investment advice – who on earth THINKS of this kind of horrific metaphor???*
*@jimcramer*

Source: https://x.com/SlopeOfHope/status/1524921393585848320

In Example 8, a similar type of locutional resistance occurred, with a Twitter user rejecting an overly graphic metaphor used by *The Economist*. The outlet used the expression "to fall on one's sword" in its headline to describe the sinking approval ratings of former Japanese Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide. The metaphor is quite conventional given that the Collins English Dictionary lists the metaphoric meaning ("to resign from one's position as a result of failure, wrongdoing, etc.") as the primary definition. The old-fashioned meaning of this expression is "to use one's sword to take one's own life". Despite the conventional nature of the metaphoric expression, the user still described it as a "metaphor crime" due to its violent imagery.

(8) *Oh Economist...the headline is a metaphor crime.*

Source: https://x.com/brettabroad/status/1434830051896332289

**Personal resistance**

Personal resistance to metaphors occurs when the individual who has used the metaphor is being accused of bias, hypocrisy, lack of expertise and so on. As noted by L. van Poppel, personal resistance to metaphors can be dismissed as ad hominem fallacy since a certain standpoint cannot be rejected solely due to an issue that someone has with the individual who has used the metaphor. However, there are still some expectations that metaphoric expressions used by a person match his or her character [van Poppel & Pilgram, 2023, p. 316].

In Example 9, personal resistance occurs after famous banker Jamie Dimon, the chief executive officer at JPMorgan, said that the U.S. economy was facing a "tsunami". However, a Twitter user has expressed personal resistance to the metaphor, accusing Jamie Dimon of hypocrisy. The user, who is likely a climate activist, accused JPMorgan of contributing to the climate crisis while tagging the Stop the Money Pipeline campaign, which is advocating for climate finance regulation.

(9) *Rich metaphor from the guy who is creating #climatechaos as fast as he can. @StopMoneyPipe*

Source: https://x.com/jooltman/status/1532483724482433036

**Situational resistance**

Finally, situational resistance occurs when a certain metaphor is not appropriate in a given social or political context. The corpus of tweets collected for this research effort contains two examples of social media users resisting metaphors with the "WEAPONS" source domain.

In Example 10, a Twitter user argues that CEOs should stop using the popular "locked and loaded" phrase when talking about business matters since it is "not a good one to use anymore". In its literal sense, the phrase means that a firearm is prepared for firing after being loaded with ammunition. When it is used metaphorically, it is meant to signal readiness.

(10) *I really wish CEOs would quit using the "locked & loaded" metaphor. Not a good one to use anymore! $NSC @CNBC*

Source: https://x.com/DarthTraderLLC/status/1585277399624818689

Another Twitter user advocates for avoiding using weapons metaphors in these "exceedingly violent times". The user was likely referring to growing gun violence in the US. Such metaphors might be considered insensitive by some audiences.

(11) *Can we avoid weapons metaphor in these exceedingly violent times?*

Source: https://x.com/beacongal/status/1162079724157300736

**Conclusions.** The results of the research effort show that audiences, which consume business media on X, might resist metaphors due to a vast array of reasons: from factual mistakes to insensitive language depicting gratuitous violence or a perceived bias.

The analysis shows that the propositional type of resistance tends to be the most common in business media discourse, confirming the hypothesis. It accounts for 45.45% of all the analyzed cases of resistance. Users of social media who take part in the discourse originally produced by business media outlets and business personalities tend to reject the very premise of metaphors due to the lack of factual accuracy as well as the lack of clarity or relevance. Business news outlets can themselves resist metaphorical expressions (case in point: *The Economist* resisting the "housing ladder" metaphor used by British politicians).

In business media discourse, metaphors can serve as a means of manipulation. For example, the usage of words like "hell" and "tsunami" prompted a CNBC viewer to voice locutional resistance due to the extreme language that was supposedly meant to influence the market in a negative way.

Future research efforts might focus on metaphor resistance in other types of discourses. Researchers might also examine how some issues can be possibly reframed in order to avoid oft-criticized metaphors.

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