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Clichés as evaluative resources: A socio-cognitive study

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Abstract

In this article, I explore clichés as socio-cognitive resources that enable the expression of attitudinal positioning in interaction. I examine a corpus of 150 clichés collected from a variety of publicly available sources and illustrate their function by exploring how they are used to convey evaluation in institutional meetings. By co-deploying the attitude system of the appraisal framework with socio-cognitive discourse analysis tools, I argue that clichés can be used to provoke evaluation through the socio-cognitive resources they evoke given the shared knowledge contained within them. The findings indicate that the majority of evaluative instances relate to performance or ability of human entities by reference to basic aspects of human experience contained in the socio-cognitive representations evoked. The article also finds that the provoked attitudinal values work in a cumulative way to create a flow of evaluative patterns, which, in turn, contributes to our understanding of the interpersonal function they perform, i.e. persuade, urge action and save face. The paper argues that the co-deployment of both approaches allows the investigation of clichés as resources for covertly expressing evaluation by reference to knowledge shared by the interlocutors.

Keywords:

Clichés, appraisal, socio-cognitive representations, metaphor, intertextuality

1. Introduction

Clichés as “taken-for-granted and unreflexive” instances of language use have been a matter of public debate for some time, normally taking a negative view of the phenomenon (Anderson-Gough et al. 1998: 566). To name but a few, BBC News (2008) published “20 of your most hated clichés” as voted by the audience featuring *at the end of the day*, *literally*, *a hundred and ten percent*, and *moving forward* among others. The issue has become so widespread that there are websites suggesting alternatives to the use of clichés in CVs and job interviews (e.g. Boyce 2015), dating situations (e.g. Smith 2015) and even in brand design (e.g. Webb 2013).

Scholarly work has addressed clichés as poor instances of language use in contrast to idioms. Monroe (1990: 18) suggests that “to acquire an idiom (...) is to be empowered...to speak in clichés is, by contrast (...) to give oneself improperly to the common”. Interestingly, however, outside the field of idiom recognition that differentiates clichés from idioms as the latter¹ being non-compositional (e.g. Jackendoff 1995), the distinction between cliché and idiom is not clear-cut. For example, expressions listed in dictionaries of idioms (e.g. Cambridge University Press 2017) also appear in any online search for clichés and published dictionaries of clichés (e.g. Fountain 2012; Rogers 1991). The classic *at the end of the day* or *think outside the box* are examples of this fuzzy boundary.

¹ In the published version this erroneously reads ‘former’.

Despite contextualizing the debate in the public domain about the social standing of clichés as a language trait best avoided, the above views do not address the reasons why clichés are so widespread. Early work by Zijderveld (1979: 58) discusses that clichés “enable us to interact mechanically...without reflection...by means of clichés we are able to interact and communicate smoothly, routinely and in a facile manner”. This definition hints at two affordances of clichés worth exploring. Firstly, clichés can be seen as knowledge that is shared and accepted by other members of the speech community. They are naturalised and conventionalised, therefore allowing for the ‘mechanic’ aspect, hinted above; in other words, they have a socio-cognitive nature (Moscovici and Duveen 2000). Secondly, clichés play a role in the construction and negotiation of interpersonal relationships by enabling speakers to express emotions and attitudes, maintain, save or threaten face, etc., in accordance with the roles, goals and relationships of speakers in a given context. From a socio-cognitive perspective, such dispositions are seen as phenomena resting upon shared frameworks of understanding and sense making of the world (Augoustinos and Walker 1995).

In this work, I elaborate on both aspects of clichés and explore the ways in which the socio-cognitive nature of clichés facilitates the expression of attitudinal positioning. I start with an exploration of the socio-cognitive nature of clichés, followed by a discussion of their interpersonal function. Using examples from institutional interactions, I then demonstrate how clichés as socio-cognitive resources can be used as devices enabling attitudinal disposition.

2. Clichés as social cognition

Clichés fulfill a socio-cognitive function in that they rely on knowledge structures shared by members of a speech community. This is linked to the notion of social representations put forward by Moscovici and Duveen (2000) who define them as pre-existing frameworks of thought embodying a stock of collective experience. Social representations provide a shared frame of reference and, by relying on the interlocutors' reservoir of knowledge for their sense making and meaning potential realisation, they perform an interpersonal function (Augoustinos and Walker 1995). Within the field of socio-cognitive discourse analysis, when broken into analytical categories, social representations have come to be known as socio-cognitive representations [hereafter SCRs] (Koller 2008; Bullo 2014). SCRs are seen as underlying frameworks used in certain discursive practices and manifested in discourse through a variety of linguistic choices.

In this work, I see clichés as instances of language use that evoke SCRs in the expression of interpersonal meanings. Such SCRs take the form of cognitive devices such as metaphor and metonymy as well as features of language such as intertextuality. Briefly defined, conceptual metaphor theory advocates that metaphors help organise humans' abstract categories by borrowing structures from more concrete categories (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Thus, one abstract concept, or domain, is understood in terms of another, usually more concrete domain and realised through a metaphoric linguistic expression. For example, the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY is linguistically manifested in expressions such as *I am at a crossroads*. Metonymy is defined as a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, "the vehicle entity", provides access to another conceptual entity, "the target entity", within the same domain (Kövecses 2002: 173). A linguistic manifestation of the metonymic relation the PRODUCER FOR THE PRODUCT would be *I'm reading*

Shakespeare. Finally, intertextuality is understood in terms of structural relations between texts (Fairclough 1992) whereby social and cultural references are brought into text production and reception (Bullo 2014, 2017).

Early studies on figurative language have considered clichés as dead metaphors (e.g. Le Sage 1941), that is expressions that have become habitual in usage and have lost their figurative and imaginative value and hence the initial imagery is not evoked, for example, *the mouth of the river*. Later psycholinguistic studies (e.g. Gibbs 1993) have argued that dead metaphors still allow for an unconscious mental mapping that evokes the initial imagery that is now seen at a distance. In that respect, clichés operate from the cognitive “comfort zone” which allows them to evoke vivid imagery from a safe distance (Oswick et al. 2002: 294). Down and Warren (2008: 8) also suggest that clichés sit in a comfort zone because they allow a “weak...attachment” to the propositional content. As such, they are safe resources for negotiating interpersonal relationships, such as the expression of attitudinal disposition, by evoking imagery without the potential effects of the literal expression. For example, they can be a useful resource in conveying a negative assessment of a situation without causing offence.

The clichés used in this study predominantly take the form of metaphors. This predominance could be accounted for by Langlotz’s (2006: 157) view that the selection of metaphorical language is indicative of the role that metaphorical systems play in “our evaluation of the development of activities and events”. The term evaluation is generally used to indicate “the expression of the speaker or writer’s attitude or their stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that she or he is talking about” (Hunston and Thompson 2003: 5). Further to this, Pratkanis and Greenwald (1989: 249) conceptualise attitude as

“knowledge structure supporting the evaluation”. From a socio-cognitive perspective, we can say that attitude, as expressed by evaluative stances, may be contingent on socio-cognitive representations given their reliance on socially shared knowledge (Bullo 2014). Hence, clichés can be seen to fulfill the function of allowing the speaker to convey an attitudinal stance by implicitly suggesting evaluation through the SCRs they evoke. By relying on the socially shared nature of such knowledge, the speaker is, at the same time, aligning the audience into a community of shared values, therefore performing an interpersonal function. Such evaluation is directly motivated by a number of factors that need to be considered as underpinning such positioning. These include, for example, who the target of the evaluation is and on what grounds the evaluation is based. A useful approach to the study of such internal mechanisms of the evaluative process that can help structure the analysis of clichés at the level of text is the appraisal framework (Martin and White 2005), which I will deal with in the following section.

3. Clichés as evaluative resources

Within the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) tradition, appraisal is an “approach to exploring, describing and explaining the way language is used to evaluate, to adopt stances, to construct textual personas and to manage interpersonal positioning and relationships” (White 2005: online) through lexical choices. This makes appraisal an appropriate system to investigate clichés as interpersonal resources. Appraisal is subdivided into three interacting domains: “attitude”, “engagement” and “graduation”. Attitude relates to the expression of attitudinal disposition towards people and entities based on emotional (affect), aesthetic (appreciation) or ethical (judgement) grounds. Graduation examines values by which speakers or writers increase or diminish feeling

by graduating the degree of intensity of an utterance (force) or blurring semantic categories (focus). Engagement is concerned with sourcing attitudes and heteroglossic voices around opinions. This paper focuses on the system of attitude which allows for a description of language that conveys evaluative disposition. The attitude system of the appraisal framework (cf. Martin and White 2005: 42-91), visually represented in the image below, can be briefly outlined as follows.

FIGURE 1

The subsystem of affect is concerned with responses and dispositions towards people, things or situations which trigger the emotion experienced by an emoter (authorial) or attributed to an emoter by the speaker (non-authorial). The values of affect describe emotions associated with the speaker's intention with respect to a stimulus (dis/inclination); emotions such as sadness, hatred, happiness, love, etc. (un/happiness); expression of peace or anxiety (in/security) and expression of accomplishment or frustration (dis/satisfaction). The subsystem of appreciation relates to the positive or negative aesthetic evaluation of objects, processes and states of affairs. Appreciation can be divided into our reactions to things, in terms of catching our attention and pleasing us, their composition in terms of balance and complexity, and their overall valuation. The final subsystem is that of judgement, which is concerned with evaluation of human behaviour by reference to the systems of veracity and propriety in a given community. Judgement also encompasses assessments of people or their behaviour as being ordinary or unusual in a given context (normality); evaluation of ability and skill in carrying out an action (capacity); and assessment of determination or willingness to sustain work towards a goal (tenacity).

The appraisal system not only encompasses values that are made explicit through a selection of overt evaluative lexis, known as inscribed appraisal, but also accounts for a description of evaluation that is implicitly embedded in various features of language, such as metaphors, or other modes such as images, that function as tokens of evaluation. This is known as invoked appraisal (Martin and White 2005). There are a number of subdivisions of invoked appraisal in regard to the different degrees of indication of the evaluative stance presented in the text and the co-text, but such divisions are yet to be unified.

In this work, I follow Economou's (2012: 249) injunction that invoked appraisal can be either evoked (the least implicit form of attitude) or provoked "by verbal imagery or lexical metaphor, such as 'he's the devil'". Therefore, metaphors may provoke attitude by carrying ideological attitudinal meanings (Economou 2012) that could be stored in the speakers' socio-cognitive environment. This does not come without its shortfalls given that the distinction between 'provoking' and 'evoking' inscribed appraisal is also bound to graduating resources (the second appraisal system, outlined above), which is beyond the remit of this work given space limitations. Furthermore, in some cases, the lack of co-text given by the confidentiality constraints of the data also presents a challenge to marking the distinction. Finally, the terminology used to refer to SCRs within socio-cognitive discourse studies also uses the word 'evoke' to indicate SCRs that are activated in discourse (e.g. Koller 2008; Bullo 2014). In what follows, I will refer to clichés invoking evaluation as 'provoking' it and I will use the term 'evoke' to refer to SCRs being drawn upon.

It is important to note that attitude, in the context discussed in this section, does not consider the socio-cognitive dimension as discussed in Section 2 but relates to the discourse semantic resources at text level to convey an evaluative stance. Martin and

White (2005), however, make reference to metaphorical expressions “as one means to covertly express attitudinal values” by reference to shared knowledge amongst the interlocutors (Lui 2018: 3).

This paper is based on the premise that discourse, as language in use, sits at the intersection between cognition and society (e.g. Koller 2008; Bullo 2014) and argues that clichés provoke evaluation by relying on their socially shared nature and thus work as tokens that nudge an evaluative positioning to be fulfilled by the recipient in interaction. I propose that the co-deployment of socio-cognitive and functional approaches allows for a thorough investigation of the functions of clichés.² On these grounds, I conceptualise and classify clichés as stretches of language that present the following characteristics: (a) conventionalised, frequently multi-word expressions that are usually, but not exclusively,³ deployed to express meaning that is not derivable from the analysis of its individual lexical items, and may take the form of metaphorical/metonymic expressions and/or intertextual references to socio-cultural/historical texts; (b) they evoke SCRs containing encyclopedic information and socio-cognitive phenomena such as attitudes and emotions (Augoustinos and Walker 1995); and (c) they fulfill an interpersonal function in communication.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data and coding

The data for this study was collected in two stages.

² The appraisal framework provides an extensive and in-depth set of analytical tools for text analysis, which is beyond the remit of this paper. It is acknowledged that only a superficial analysis of appraisal is provided here as a way of anchoring the socio-cognitive analysis.

³ This paper does not claim that clichés are only metaphorical and that evaluation is the only interpersonal meaning they provoke. Other forms and functions of clichés are being explored in current work by the author.

Firstly, a list of 150 common clichés, that is, expressions fulfilling the criteria outlined in the previous section, frequently found in the media, especially reality television, and clichés listed in websites devoted to the subject (e.g. BBC 2008) was compiled. The list was subjected to the following steps:

(a) I read the stretches of conversation collected (e.g. from The Apprentice TV show) to get a general understanding of their meaning.

(b) I identified the basic contemporary meanings of the expressions from their literal meanings, as below.

(c) I categorised clichés as metaphorical by use of the metaphor identification procedure (MIP) (Pragglejaz Group 2007) contrasting the basic and contextual meanings of every lexical component in the expression and identifying those with a clash between both meanings as metaphorical. Intertextual clichés were classified in this manner by identification of a referent found outside the co-text and inferred to be present in the participants' socio-cultural/historical context.

(d) I sub-grouped clichés in terms of superordinate domains (i.e. SCRs) I inferred them to instantiate (cf. Table 2).

(e) I identified clichés used for evaluative purposes, i.e. with the intention of conveying either a positive or a negative disposition towards an entity or event (Hunston and Thompson 2003). These were classified as such by exploration of “ideational selections” involved in constructing an evaluative disposition in the co-text even “in the absence of attitudinal lexis” (Martin and white 2005: 62).

(f) I cross-referenced the clichés categorised through the steps above with published dictionaries of clichés (e.g. Rogers 1991; Fountain 2012). The use of varied sources ensured that the clichés used in this study are seen to be available to all speakers and

not a specific community of practice. This was followed by an exploration of how they are realised in a specific setting, i.e. an educational institution, for illustration during the second stage of the study.

In the second stage, the listed clichés were cross-referenced with clichés occurring in meetings and email communication at departmental level at an educational establishment over a period of a year. These consisted of gender balanced staff interactions within a specific community of practice (i.e. linguists), with people performing similar roles with similar educational backgrounds in an age range between 30 and 60 years old. All clichés recorded were anonymised to ensure compliance with ethical procedures. The steps involved in this stage were as follows:

(g) I identified the most recurrent clichés and added examples of co-text for analysis. At the end of the process, 40 expressions fulfilling the criteria outlined at the end of the previous section were recorded more than 10 times during the second stage of data collection and used for analysis. Due to confidentiality agreement with participants, it is not possible to include full stretches of conversation but sample co-text retaining the original sense is provided.

(h) I coded clichés in terms of appraisal values by categorizing the polarity (positive/negative) and appraisal category (affect, appreciation, judgement), subcategories (e.g. dissatisfaction) (cf. Figure 1) and target of the appraisal provoked by the cliché through an examination of co-text. It is important to point out that the appraisal categories allow for various interpretations of the data. For example, a cliché may simultaneously realise more than one type of evaluative meaning and hence the percentages outlined below assume one category.

4.2 Appraisal values and SCRs

The values of the manual appraisal categorisation found in the data are presented in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1

As shown in Table 2 below, clichés were clustered in 11 general types of socio-cognitive models: animals, the human body, colour, containers, events, food, motion, self and space, sports and games, substance and tools.

TABLE 2

The full list of clichés analysed is provided in the appendix section. Due to space restrictions, not all clichés included in the appendix have been mentioned in the analysis but it has been ensured that a representative sample of clichés in each SCR cluster has been discussed.

In the next section, I analyse clichés through (a) a textual level description of how they provoke evaluation; and (b) a socio-cognitive interpretation explaining the SCRs I infer them to evoke and a description of the metaphorical mappings and or intertextual referents accordingly. The discussion is structured by cluster of SCR (cf. Table 2). The SCRs with the least percentage of clichés in them have been clustered under one generic heading at the end. SCRs, also referred to as cognitive models or models of cognition for the purposes of avoiding repetition, are listed in the titles as

numbered subheadings. Clichés as data are provided in *italics*. Following the cognitive linguistics tradition, conceptual metaphors and metaphorical and metonymic domains are graphically represented in UPPER CASE. Appraisal categories are presented in **bold**.

5. Analysing clichés

This section presents a discussion of how the clichés provoke evaluation by instantiating socio-cognitive representations. The clichés are numbered in square brackets for ease of identification in the appendix.

5.1. Motion

This is one of the largest groups identified (cf. Table 2). The majority of the clichés seen as instantiating motion SCRs are used to provoke negative **judgement** of **capacity** and take the form of expressions within or linked to the PROGRESS AS FORWARD MOVEMENT IN SPACE metaphor. This, according to Lakoff (1993), is indicative of the conceptualisation of a problem, entity or situation as progress or a lack of it. For example, in *we are not moving forward* [1], the team is credited with the inability to move and make progress with a task. Ineffective development of tasks is also indicated by “expressions evoking circular movement” (Langlotz 2006: 157) also provoking negative **judgement** as in *we just seem to be going around in circles* [5]. The MOVEMENT metaphor is also used to provoke negative **propriety**. In *we started off on the wrong foot* [7] the foot is seen as a metonymy for ability to walk and make progress. The trigger of the evaluation is the vehicle domain foot that gives access to the target domain of the person carrying out the action. The system also has

VEHICLES to help movement and make progress (Langlotz 2006). In *we've missed the boat* [12], boarding or not the vehicle correlates with successfully taking an opportunity or not and provoking **judgement of capacity**.

5.2. The body and self

The second main cluster of clichés relates to SCRs of the body for provoking evaluation of **affect** and **judgement**. **Affect** is provoked by *to be in stitches* [15], which suggests a degree of laughter and euphoria to the extent of causing physical pain or damage. Stitches metonymically stand for PAIN, which is, in turn, a metaphor for the **happiness** experienced by the emoter. A recurrent case indicating praise at the efforts that lead to the achievement of a task is found in *they've achieved this with blood sweat and tears* [18]. This cliché provokes **judgement of tenacity** in two ways: firstly, VITAL FLUIDS are mapped onto the target domain UTMOST EFFORTS (A'Beckett 2005). Secondly, appraisal is provoked by the biblical reference to the agony of Christ which was popularised by Britain's WWII Prime Minister Winston Churchill's inspirational speech declaring that he had "nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat" and of "victory at all costs..." (Parliament UK n.d.).

Metaphors relating to SELF and SPACE are also deployed to provoke authorial **affect** based on emotional states as in *I am beside myself with rage over this* [20]. The SELF is a metaphorical model generally used "to conceptualise normal self-control by the subject and lack of it" (Lakoff 1996: 110). In an upsetting situation, the subject perceives their location as outside the bounded region and hence lacking in self-control (Lakoff 1996). In this case the emoter is placing themselves outside the

bounded region of the body (i.e. a CONTAINER) in a location nearby to provoke **affect** under the subcategory of **dissatisfaction**.

Similarly, *it drives me up the wall* [21] provokes **dissatisfaction** in the emoter by comparing an upsetting situation to an external force causing displacement from the ground (i.e. normal) position to the vertical position (i.e. abnormal). Contrariwise, in *he's been on cloud nine all week* [22] the speaker uses body displacement to provoke positive **affect** indicating somebody's **happiness** and euphoria at a situation. In this case, the lack of normal placement is a positive state.

5.3. Sports and games

Boers and Stengers (2008: 64) suggest that SPORTS metaphors “project the experimental logic or value judgements associated with the scenario”. In the BOXING metaphor (Ritchie 2003) *I am aware that I am punching above my weight on this one* [24], the speaker self-appraises (negative **judgement** of **capacity**) on the task by mapping his own performance to participating in a boxing game with a boxer from a different physical weight class. In the *below the belt* example [23], the offensive nature of a comment made provokes **judgement** of **propriety**. Finally, in the highly recurrent *game changer* cliché [26], a situation is being evaluated in terms of its impact on the current course of action. Hence, the metaphor provokes **appreciation** by mapping the issue under discussion onto a strategic maneuver in the game that requires a change of direction in the way the game is to be played thereafter.

5.4. Animals

Animal SCRs are frequently evoked by clichés provoking negative **affect**. In *it really rattles my cage* [27], the person experiencing the emotion is mapped to an ANIMAL kept in captivity, presumably a ferocious one. Within the ANIMAL metaphor, the horse tends to feature prominently. In *I heard it straight from the horse's mouth* [29], with the mouth working metonymically as PART FOR THE WHOLE, the horse is mapped onto a reliable course of information provoking positive **judgement** of **veracity**. The horse's mouth also appeals to encyclopedic knowledge of customs in the old horse-trading business whereby the quality of horses was judged by examining their mouth (Pauwels and Simon-Vanderbergen 1995). One further equine related cliché provoking **judgement** of **veracity** is *I'm not too sure about him, he's a bit of a dark horse* [30]. The dark horse is mapped onto a person who is perceived to carry a degree of mystery, thus causing others difficulty in guessing their thinking. The colour is, in fact, the main carrier of appraisal in this cliché. Colour is also significant in *a bit of a grey area* [31] where the colour is used to appraise a situation that is difficult to gauge, hence provoking appraisal of **appreciation** (**complexity**). The cliché is used to convey a degree of caution and warn about taking action given the unmarked lines of responsibility of the parties involved in that particular issue.

5.5. Food

SCRs associated with food are also identified as provoking evaluative meanings. In *that suggestion is food for thought* [32], the conventional metaphor IDEAS ARE FOOD is seen to provoke **appreciation** by conveying an assessment in relation to the **impact** an event or idea has caused on the speaker. In *that is the forbidden fruit* [33] we find an intertextual reference to the biblical notion of Eve eating a fruit that was forbidden to her. The cliché works by evoking the shared knowledge of the

consequences of eating the forbidden fruit. The emphasis thus is not on the fruit in itself, or the act that is being avoided, but rather on the potential consequences that carrying out such task may bring about. The cliché in itself represents a case of assessment of the overall task (**appreciation**) but it only works by reference to the morality system (**judgement**) being evoked via the intertextual reference feeding into the SCR. Finally, *I am biting off more than I can chew* [34] provokes **judgement of capacity** in relation to the self-perceived inability to perform efficiently.

5.6. Event schemas, tools and containers

Event schemas, or mental representations of expectations about typical procedures in particular situations such as going to restaurants, interviews, etc. (Schank and Abelson 1977), can also be seen to provoke evaluation. In *not me...been there done that bought the T-shirt* [36], the speaker resorts to a schema of tourist behaviour whereby people purchase a t-shirt as a souvenir to remember the experience. In this case, the speaker provokes **disinclination** by refusing to repeat the action without expressing their feelings towards the situation in itself but rather emphasising having experienced it already with perhaps an undertone of cynicism or dismissal. As for tools SCRs, in *cutting-edge research* [37], the positive **valuation** of the research is provoked by comparing it to a tool with a sharp edge or blade that produces precise effects. The innovation and quality of the research is mapped onto the sharp quality of the knife's blade. Finally, **judgement of capacity** is provoked by the container metaphor in *let's think outside the box for a minute* [38]. In this recurrent cliché, normal thinking is seen as contained within the box whilst innovative ideas are found in an alternative space in relation to the enclosed surroundings of the box.

6. Discussion

In this paper, clichés have been conceptualised as evaluative instances of conventionalised non-literal language use that evoke underlying frameworks of thought manifested in a variety of linguistic choices such as metaphorical and metonymic expressions and intertextual references.

The main clusters of SCRs are movement, the human body and self in space, food and animals. This shows consistency with cognitive linguistics theories that argue that language, rather than being structured arbitrarily, is mostly motivated and grounded in bodily, physical, social and cultural experience (e.g. Johnson 1992). This is also consistent with studies of conceptual metaphors and idioms which conclude that “the meanings of idioms are ... motivated by metaphorical schemes of thought that are very much part of our everyday thinking and reasoning” (Gibbs 1992: 504). The findings indicate that, far from being removed and isolated, the conceptualisation of life in this institutional setting and assessment of its people and events is grounded on basic aspects of human experience. The consistency in use of clichés in the situated context studied in stage two with those found in the media and dictionaries in stage one of the data collection is also indicative of the conventionality and widespread use of clichés and, therefore, of their collective nature as structures of knowledge that are socio-culturally shared.

In order to explore how evaluation functions linguistically in the data, this paper has co-deployed the attitude system of the appraisal framework, alongside the socio-cognitive discourse analysis tools. Using the system of attitude, albeit superficially, allowed for an understanding of the subtle patterns of provoked evaluation as a

function of clichés as socio-cognitive devices. The data reveals that the majority of appraisal instances relate to the assessment of performance, ability or behaviour of human entities, manifested in values of **judgement**. The second largest cluster relates to the subsystem of **affect** indicating assessment based on emotional states of the speakers or attributed to an emoter by the speaker mostly associated with body and self SCRs. Clichés within this category also relate to emotions caused by elements in the work environment, with frustration and anger being the most predominant emotions identified. The predominance of negative values of **judgement** and **affect** is significant in that, given that the assessment of human entities or behaviour as well as emotional disposition has the potential for hindering interpersonal relationships, clichés come in as a handy resource. By drawing on socially shared cognitive models clichés are able to convey the necessary entailments inherent to, say, metaphorical domains (Gibbs 1992), while still preserving a safe detachment from the propositional content of the literal words. It is such safe ‘mechanicity’ that renders clichés useful resources for negotiating interpersonal relationships.

By reference to widely shared and available structures of knowledge, clichés can also be seen to work cumulatively, over various stretches of situated conversation, to create semantic interdependence texturing the evaluation (Martin 2004) whilst also construing a local community of values (Lui 2018). This links to the notion of prosody, proposed by appraisal, which regards interpersonal meanings as working in a cumulative way to create a flow of evaluative patterns in interaction (Oteiza and Pinuer 2013: 48). The prosodic effect of clichés as evaluative devices, which social cognition allows to transfer to different communities by virtue of the conventionalised nature of the SCRs evoked, contributes to the negotiation of interpersonal relationships between speakers and their interlocutors, as follows.

Clichés as evaluative devices fulfil three main functions in this study. In some cases, they help convey the gravity of the situation or the amount of distress a situation causes, as manifested by predominant values of **affect**, through the imagery they carry. Saying that one is being driven *up the wall* or that something *rattles one's cage* conveys a more effective assessment of a situation causing distress than the inscribed *I am angry* form. The interlocutor, by decoding the imagery conveyed, thus gets a sense of such emotional state given the shared knowledge of, say, angry animals. The encyclopedic knowledge of the interlocutor not only encompasses the image of the angry animal but also the potential consequences or entailments of it, hence maximising the semantic value of the appraisal. Evaluative clichés therefore allow speakers to share feelings, and in so doing, generate social belonging (Martin 2004) by evoking shared SCRs.

We also see clichés used as persuasion devices. The motion SCRs in the expression of negative **judgement** of **capacity** constitute examples of SCRs intended to convey the imminent need for improvement of performance. Take, for example, the recurrent *we are shifting the deck chairs but not getting anywhere* that works by conveying a sense of the severity of the situation and urges a change in the current actions in order to improve performance. In this way, clichés are a useful “aspect of rhetoric” as well as a “vehicle for...sense making” (Anderson-Gough et al. 1998: 566) and, as such, strengthen the **appraisal** of **judgement** directed at the perceived poor performance and, therefore, incite action.

Finally, we also see clichés used for face-saving purposes. For example saying *you got to walk the walk* works to mitigate the positive face threat posed by the negative **judgement** of **capacity** on the interlocutor's ability to perform effectively, a topic worth exploring further from an (im)politeness perspective (e.g. Bousfield 2008). The

majority of clichés identified as expressing **judgement** of **capacity** do, in fact, have a save-facing function that is possibly accounted for by the work environment within which the conversations have taken place.

7. Conclusion

As it is normally the case with studies addressing various fields, depth had to be compromised. One important aspect that had to be overlooked due to space constraints is the fact that complementing the analysis of evaluative meanings using the graduation system of the framework, alongside the attitude system, would have provided a richer account of evaluative meanings. This is worth putting forward for future exploration given that clichés as evaluative resources work intrinsically as graduation devices. That is, their selection over the literal language may be due to the speaker wanting to increase or diminish feelings by graduating the degree of intensity of an utterance, especially when conveying a negative stance. Clichés, as graduation values, work by infusing intensification in the expression by means of imagery (Economou 2012; Martin and White 2005). The now clichéd *literally*, for example, is a recurrent example of a graduation device that allows for adjustment of amplitude and precision of the evaluation to reach its maximum force, which is, in many cases, used to graduate the force of an attitudinal cliché that follows as in the example *we are literally hitting a brick wall here*. As explained above, this issue is beyond the scope of this paper but it is worth explaining as a caveat limiting the depth of the appraisal analysis and calling for future investigation.

Another caveat is the identification of source domains within metaphors. In some cases, there may be multiple source domains at work, e.g., *rattle my cage* can be seen

as both ANIMAL and CONTAINER metaphor. The article aims to identify the generic SCRs which are manifested in various forms – metaphor being one of them (albeit the most prominent) – and hence its scope does not allow for a full in-depth discussion of the decisions in source domains categorisation.

Finally, restrictions in terms of the co-text provided due to confidentiality issues may hinder or obscure the reasons behind the analytical categorisation of appraisal values. This paper is based on the premise that clichés, as socio-cognitive structures enabling the enactment of the interpersonal function in interaction, are shared and available to all members of the situated community. By this, however, I am not denying that issues of power, gender relations, socio-cultural background, etc. should be disregarded. A more in-depth sociolinguistic study exploring a wider selection of the institutional population and power relations effect on the use of evaluative clichés would allow for a more generalisable trend of cliché usage and therefore address such sociolinguistic aspects that fall outside the remit of the current study.

This paper has tried to show that clichés can be used to provoke evaluation through the SCRs they evoke given the shared knowledge contained within them. The use of figurative language over its literal equivalent “do(es) not convey the same inferences about the causes, intentionality and manner” (Gibbs 1992: 487) in which attitudinal disposition is experienced by speakers. Clearly there is an argument for such selection being an unconscious, embodied experience of a conventionalised nature, which makes clichés available to all speakers of a shared socio-cognitive environment, as cognitive linguistics theory argues (e.g. Lakoff and Johnson 1980). The point is that, even if the selection is unconscious, i.e. ‘mechanical’, as pointed out by Zijdeveld (1979), the role of the receiver is crucial in the realisation of the evaluation due to the socially shared nature of the socio-cognitive representations evoked in the process.

This therefore highlights the prominence of clichés in enabling the interaction, which can only happen, and be realised, by virtue of the socially shared aspect of clichés.

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Appendix 1

Figures

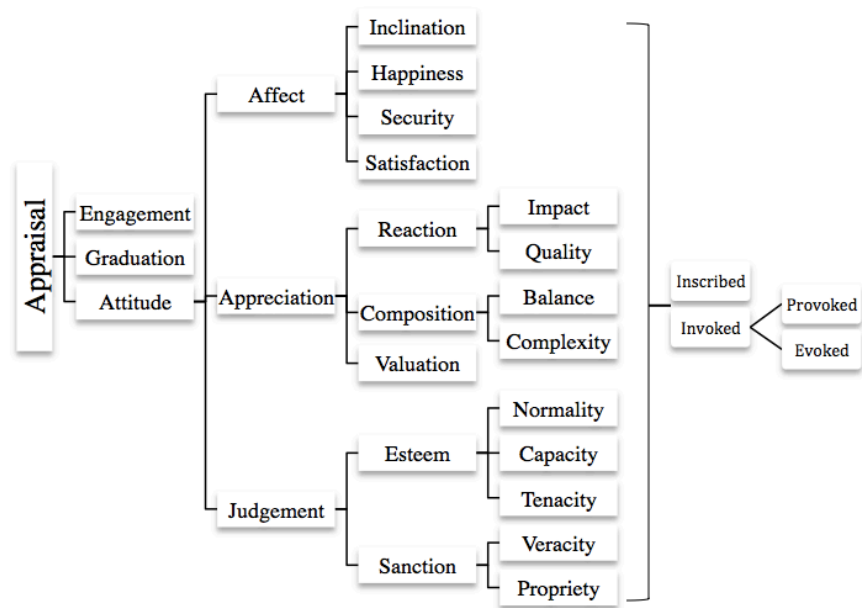


Figure 1: The Appraisal Taxonomy and the subsystem of Attitude (adapted from Martin and White, 2005)

Tables

Table 1: Appraisal percentages

| | Affect | Appreciation | Judgement |
|----------|--------|--------------|-----------|
| Total | 26% | 19% | 56% |
| Positive | 27% | 25% | 17% |
| Negative | 73% | 75% | 83% |

Table 2: Percentage of occurrence per SCR

| SCR | % of occurrence in data |
|--|-------------------------|
| Motion | 30% |
| Body and self | 28% |
| Food | 12% |
| Animal | 9% |
| Sports | 9% |
| Containers, colours, event schemas, substances and tools | 2% (each) |

Appendix 2

Coding key:

A/NA: authorial/non-authorial

Happ: happiness

Inc: inclination

Sat: satisfaction

Sec: security

Comp: composition

R/I: reaction impact

Val: valuation

Cap: capacity

Norm: normality

Prop: propriety

Ver: veracity

t, token of