Varieties of National Metonymy

in Media Accounts of International Mergers and Acquisitions

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Abstract

International mergers and acquisitions (M&As) often invoke national identification and national cultural differences. We argue that metonymy is a central linguistic resource through which national cultural identities and differences are reproduced in media accounts of international M&As. In this paper, we focus on two revealing cases: the acquisition of American IBM Personal Computer Division (PCD) by the Chinese company Lenovo and the acquisition of American Anheuser-Busch (A-B) by the Belgian-Brazilian company InBev. First, we identify the forms, functions and frequencies of national metonymy in media accounts of these cases. We present a typology that classifies varieties of national metonymy in international M&As. Second, we demonstrate how these metonyms combine with metaphor to generate evocative imagery, engaging wit, and subversive irony. Our findings show that national metonymy contributes to the construction of emotive frames, stereotypes, ideological differences, and threats. Combinations of national metonymy with metaphor also provide powerful means to construct cultural differences. However, combinations of metonymy with wit and irony enable the play on meanings that overturns and resists national and cultural stereotypes. This is the first study to unpack the deployment of metonymy in accounts of international M&As. In doing so, it also opens up new avenues for research into international management and the analysis of tropes in management and organization.

Key words

Metonymy, metaphor, irony, merger, acquisition, culture, national identity, ambiguity
Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) are phenomena of increasing salience for international management. Of particular concern is that international M&As often invoke cultural differences and national identification. Traditionally, approaches to cultural differences focused on factors intrinsic to organizations and national cultures which generate clashes in values and practices. Increasingly, however, research has demonstrated the central relevance of language in shaping culture and identity (Ailon-Suday and Kunda, 2003; Søderberg, 2006; Vaara, 2002). Specifically, extant research highlights the importance of metaphors in international M&As (Koller, 2005; Vaara, Tienari and Säntti, 2003). Far less is known about metonymy – a figure of speech that replaces the name of one thing with the name of something else associated with it. Since metonymy pervades language, this oversight has limited knowledge of the micro-level processes that shape national cultural differences. In this paper, we argue that metonymy plays a central role in shaping national identities and reproducing cultural differences in accounts of international M&As.

By focusing on national metonymy, we introduce a new theoretical perspective on the formulation of national and cultural differences in international management. In doing so, we address the oversight in previous literature by connecting micro-level identity construction in language to the phenomena of international M&As. The purpose of this paper is to identify various types of national metonymy, and to illustrate ways in which these are used to construct national cultural differences in accounts of international M&As. We draw on research on tropes – figures of speech – in management and organization (Cornelissen, 2005; Oswick et al., 2002; Palmer and Dunford, 1996; Tsoukas, 2001) and specifically on recent research on metonymy (Cornelissen, 2008; Musson and Tietze, 2004) to analyse the dynamics of national metonymy in media representations of international M&As.

We focus on media accounts of two cases: the acquisition of American IBM Personal Computer Division (PCD) by the Chinese company Lenovo and the acquisition of American Anheuser-Busch (A-B) by the Belgian-Brazilian company InBev. These acquisitions were characterized by extensive media coverage featuring intensive debate that drew on national identities and cultural differences. Such media texts serve as fertile ground for studying cultural differences in international M&As for three reasons. First, in appealing to their local readership, media outlets in different countries and regions draw on salient cultural differences to shape their stories of a merger or acquisition. Second, media texts are an important and accessible representation of public discourse on M&As. They may include direct opinions or statements by corporate executives or politicians or aim at influencing such constituents rhetorically. Third,
media texts are readily available through various research databases that serve as a rich repository allowing us to compile a corpus for systematic analysis of national metonymy.

The analysis addresses two research questions: What are the forms and functions of national metonymies in media representations of international M&As? In what ways are national metonymies connected to metaphorical expressions in these media accounts? Through our analysis, we present a typology that elucidates the central types and roles of national metonymy in international M&As. We also discuss the patterns through which metonymy combines with metaphor to generate evocative imagery, engaging wit, and subversive irony.

The paper makes three contributions. To our knowledge, this is the first study that unpacks the use of metonymy in international M&As. Specifically, it outlines how national metonymies are used in combination with other tropes to construct national identities and reproduce national cultural differences. Second, the study adds to research in international management by providing new insight into the linguistic micro-processes that shape perceptions of cultural differences. Third, the analysis contributes to research on organizational tropes by demonstrating the ways in which metonymy intersects with metaphor, wit and irony to create both ‘resonance’ and ‘dissonance’ in organizational representations.

The paper is structured as follows. We begin with a brief review of research on culture and national identity in international M&As, and then discuss metonymy as a central trope in linguistic representation. Next, we turn to methodology and present the cases and the empirical material including its categorization and coding. The findings present the forms, frequency and functions of national metonymy, as well as its role in grounding other tropes. Altogether, we outline the various ways in which metonymic representations construct cultural differences and national identity in international M&As. In closing, we discuss the theoretical contributions to the management literature and reflect on the implications for future research.

NATIONAL CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN INTERNATIONAL M&AS

Research on M&As has often focused on culture and identity (Buono, Bowditch and Lewis, 1985; Marks and Mirvis, 1985; Stahl and Mendenhall, 2005). Characteristic to this research has been an essentialist view in which relatively stable and salient differences in beliefs, values and practices create incompatibilities and clashes in merging organizations (Goulet and Schweiger, 2006; Teerikangas and Very, 2006). In international settings, this research has often drawn from the ideas on national cultural traits by Hofstede (1980) and others (Morosini et al., 1998; Olie, 1994).
This essentialist view has been challenged by scholars who have argued for a more nuanced understanding; one that treats cultural differences as social constructions and focuses on the processes of cultural identity-building (Gertsen et al., 1998; Kleppestø, 2005; Riad, 2005). Following this trajectory of thought, researchers have recently examined national identity from discursive perspectives. For example, Vaara (2002) illustrated how the retrospective narratives of managers drew from various discourses to construct images of success and failure. National discourses were central resources in these narratives, and were often deliberately used to blame others. Ailon-Souday and Kunda (2003) addressed national stereotypes in merger integration, illustrating how such language was closely linked with images of superiority and inferiority. Tienari et al. (2003), in turn, examined how acquisitions involve struggles wherein national arguments are used by both protagonists and antagonists. In an analysis of individuals’ narratives, Søderberg (2006) demonstrated how these enable a better understanding of sensemaking and polyphony in cross-border mergers (for example, the construction of helpers and opponents). Relevant here is a metaphor analysis of organizational and national identity-building by Vaara et al. (2003). This illustrated how images of ‘us’ and ‘them’ during M&As were reproduced through a variety of metaphors (including war and sports).

These and other studies have advanced understanding of the discursive and social processes involved in the construction of national cultural differences and identities. The fact remains, however, that little is known about the linguistic micro-processes through which cultural differences and national identities are created during international mergers and acquisitions. In this paper, we argue that national metonymy plays a powerful linguistic role in eliciting the dynamics of identity and difference. Hence, it warrants close attention in its own right. We also scrutinise metonymy in combinations with other tropes since these provide insights into the construction of national identities and cultural differences.

The organizational literature has increasingly focused on the interrelationships between national, social and organizational identity (e.g. Jack and Lorbiecki, 2007). Social identity builds on people’s sense of belonging to a specific group that they come to value, and which constitutes the ‘we’. In its quest for “positive distinctiveness”, a social group differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’, thereby creating an in-group and an out-group. In reviewing the identity literature, Cornelissen et al. (2007) offer a perspective on collective identities that are fluid rather than fixed, and which can be strategically deployed towards collective action aimed at organizational outcomes. They suggest a need for examining processes of identity formation, specifically by connecting micro-level identity phenomena to broader identity processes.
In this paper, we approach national identity from a critical perspective (Bhabha, 1999; Billig, 1995; Wodak et al., 1999), specifically drawing on works that consider language as the core of a nation’s identity and its expression (Sutherland, 2005). For example, Billig (1995) discussed how national identities are accepted and reproduced through the mundane use of language, thought, and symbolism. So, when the term ‘we’ is used to refer to a ‘national’ collective, the speaker and the audience are involved in myriad processes that reconstruct the ‘nation’ and the nation’s ‘others’. This echoes Anderson’s (1983) idea of nations as ‘imagined communities’ rather than stable a-historical institutions. Bhabha (1999) theorizes national identity through narrative, pointing to the over-determined processes by which its meanings are reproduced in language. Wodak et al. (1999), in turn, focus on a variety of linguistic processes through which national identities are constructed and transformed. Billig, in particular, refers to ‘metonymic nationalism’ (1995: 9) – an idea that we borrow from in our analysis.

METONYMY, METAPHOR AND THEIR COMBINATIONS

Metonymy is one of the classic tropes, or figures of speech (words used in a sense that is different from their literal meaning) (Bloom, 1975; Burke, 1969b; Jakobson, 1956, 1971; Lakoff and Johnson, 1999; Preminger and Brogan, 1993). ‘Metonymy’ comes from the Greek for “change of name”. A word replaces another based on a relation that is material, causal or conceptual (Preminger and Brogan, 1993; Panther and Radden, 1999). Common examples include the bottle for alcoholic drink, the press for journalism, or the expression the pen is mightier than the sword (i.e. writing is more powerful than warfare, Baldick, 1990). In each of these examples, the metonym is derived from and refers to the same domain as the word it replaces. A central form of metonymy involves whole-part or part-whole substitution (Cornelissen, 2008).¹ Metonymy is frequent in speech and writing (Deignan, 2005) – yet, its role as a figure of speech is “disguised” by its familiarity (Matus, 1988: 307). Such widespread subtlety, however, mandates vigilance since its functions can pass unnoticed and unquestioned.

Most of the research on tropes in organization and management research has focused on metaphor (Morgan, 1983; Palmer and Dunford, 1996; Tsoukas, 1991; Oswick et al., 2002). This has also been the case in research on M&As. For example, Hirsch and Andrews (1983) examined the role of warfare images in hostile takeovers, Schneider and Dunbar (1992) offered a psychoanalytic reading of such acquisitions, Koller (2005) analyzed metaphors in media texts from a critical discursive perspective, and – as noted above – Vaara et al. (2003) studied the use of metaphors in identity-building in a cross-border merger.
Metonymy, in turn, has received much less attention (Cornelissen, 2008; Musson and Tietze, 2004; Putnam, 2004; Watson, 1995). There are, however, important exceptions. Musson and Tietze (2004) focused on organizational talk about places and spaces, illustrating how metonymic chains spread, and thereby both reproduce and change organizational order. Putnam’s (2004) ethnographic study depicted the crucial role of metonymy in negotiations. Cornelissen (2008) adopted a corpus-based approach in his analysis of company names, showing how metonymic expressions and metaphor-metonymy combinations played a central role in language about organizations. Despite these and other advances, the study of metonymy in organizational analysis is still in its infancy when compared with work on metaphor.

The relationship between metonymy and metaphor is not clear-cut and continues to be a contested site. Some authors have put metonymy on a par with metaphor (Jakobson, 1956, 1971; White, 1978), and have at times considered it a prerequisite for metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Warhol (1994) suggests that if metaphor is a blossom, then metonymy is its bud. Organizational theorists have increasingly recognized the interconnectedness of metaphor and metonymy (Cornelissen, 2008; Morgan, 1996; Musson and Tietze, 2004). Our position is that metonymy is not subordinate to metaphor (Oswick et al., 2002, 2004) and that it is equally relevant. This is not only due to its pervasiveness, but also because its role tends to be hidden (Matus, 1988; Musson and Tietze, 2004). However, it is not our intention to reorganize hierarchical relations across tropes. We agree with Oswick et al. (2004) that a relative ranking of tropes may not be a productive endeavour so long as the relevance of each is not marginalized. In what follows, we briefly review some of the distinctions and relations between metonymy and metaphor.

First, a common distinction is that metonymy establishes relations of contiguity between things, whereas metaphor establishes relations of similarity between them (Baldick, 1990; Childers and Hentzi, 1995; Jakobson, 1971). Metonymy’s “proxy” is derived from its “proximity,” to use Matus’ (1988) terms. Second, metaphor involves mental mapping between domains, whereas metonymy relies on intradomain mapping (Deignan, 2005; Oswick et al, 2004). For example, bottle is of the same domain as the drink that fills it in drank the whole bottle – whereas in organizational deployment, the word battle is taken from a source domain of ‘war’ and mapped onto the different domain of ‘business’. Third, there is ‘origin’. Some argue that metaphors are often initially metonymic (Deignan, 2005; Musson and Tietze, 2004). This is relevant to vision, which is commonly deployed in organization. Derived from the act of seeing a physical object, it was extended to conceptual farsightedness, initially by an individual and then by organizations. However, some metonymies become so common that users are not aware
of their figurative links (Verspoor and de Bie-Kerékjártó, 2006). In some ways this is akin to the notion of a ‘dead metaphor’ – a normalized term whose earlier metaphoric deployment is opaque to the user (Koller, 2005; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Tsoukas, 1991).

Importantly, metaphor and metonymy can interact to result in complex expressions (Cornelissen, 2008; Deignan, 2005; Feyaerts and Brône, 2005). Goossens (1990: 323) coined “metaphtonymy” and assigned it the status of a “cover term” to increase awareness that metonymy and metaphor can be intertwined. He lists four potential interactions, two of which are rare, while the other two are metaphor-from-metonymy and metonymy-within-metaphor. Extending his work, Deignan (2005) argued that there is a cline from metonymy to metaphor that includes the previous two interactions as well as metonymy-based metaphor. In his study of language about organization, Cornelissen (2008) pointed out that when metaphors and metonymies are interlinked, the metaphor-from-metonymy pattern – i.e. metaphorical meaning grounded in metonymy – was more pronounced than metonymy-within-metaphor – i.e. metonymy as part of metaphor.

Combinations of metonymy and metaphor can also be witty (Feyaerts and Brône, 2005). Such wit may then be deployed to enable irony – a trope of increasing interest to management and organization (Johansson and Woodilla, 2005; Oswick et al, 2002, 2004; Sewell and Barker, 2006). Irony enables resistance by suggesting that “you might think that A is like B, but don’t be fooled”. It calls for reflexivity regarding the deceptive appearances (Oswick et al., 2002: 299). In doing so, irony can often have a moral or political edge (Oswick et al., 2004).

In international settings, it is important to note that language and culture shape the use of metonymy. Here, we mention some aspects relevant to the languages examined in this paper: English, Chinese, Dutch and French. In comparing metonymic idioms across English, Dutch and Asian languages, Lai (2008) concludes that local knowledge schemas culturally constrain and regulate the linguistic choice of metonymy and its interpretations. In another study that focuses on symbols across the English, French and Dutch languages (among others), Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen (1998) underline interaction between the cultural and cognitive dimensions of experience. They argue that symbols function linguistically through metonymy, which serves to articulate cultural knowledge as well as cultural differences. Further, in their study of colour metonymies across five languages (including Dutch), Verspoor and de Bie-Kerékjártó (2006) argue that while some metonymic expressions are widely spread across languages, and metonymic classifications can be similar, the use of metonymy differs in culturally specific ways. For some languages, metonymy is more central than other tropes. For example, metaphor
is overshadowed by metonymy in classical Chinese poetry (Yeh, 1982) and colloquial Chinese expressions favour metonymy over metaphor in elaborating domains of experience used to conceptualise emotions (King, 1989). Last but not least is metonymy’s role in the daily press across languages and cultures. It is prominent in the English language press (Feyaerts and Brône, 2005) and Lecolle’s (2001) study of the French press illustrates how the names of institutions, cities and countries stand for individuals. She argues that this practice is useful for journalists, enabling them to construct “fuzzy references” that are economical and imprecise.

**METHODOLOGY**

In this theory-building paper, we focus on media accounts of two revealing international acquisitions. These cases provided us with an opportunity to explore the forms, frequency and functions of national metonymy and to identify varieties of its combination with metaphor. In analysing the case material, we addressed the following questions: How are cultural differences instantiated in and through national metonyms? How does national metonymy enable emotive framing and stereotyping? Conversely, how can metonymy subvert or overturn stereotypical cultural differences? In what follows, we discuss the cases, empirical material and analysis.

**The Case Settings**

The first case is the acquisition by Lenovo, a computer firm based in China, of IBM’s Personal Computer Division (PCD) in the USA (hereinafter Lenovo/IBM PCD). The acquisition was announced on December 7th, 2004. The event drew considerable media attention for many months thereafter and was featured extensively in both English- and Chinese-language media accounts. The second case is the acquisition by InBev, a Belgian-Brazilian firm, of Anheuser-Busch (A-B) in the USA (hereinafter InBev/A-B). The former is famous for its Budweiser beer, and the latter for its Stella beer. Following an unsolicited takeover bid in June 2008, a revised deal based on a raised offer was reached by mid-July. In this case, there was also substantial media attention in accounts of the acquisition in English, French and Dutch.

In both cases, the nation mattered. The association was succinctly made in a sub-heading in *The Economist* (2008), “Never mind the Chinese – here come the Belgians.” First, both acquisitions were of iconic firms in the USA – albeit by firms from different parts of the world, China and Belgium-Brazil. Interestingly, in the latter case, English language representations of the acquisition predominantly reduced the complex national affiliation to “Belgian”. Second, in both cases there were reports of public concern in the USA about the effects of foreign ownership on such an “icon”. In the InBev/A-B acquisition, supporters of Anheuser-Busch beers
set up two websites (SaveAB.com and SaveBudweiser.com) and collected signatures in an attempt to stop the deal. Third, in both cases there were attempts by politicians to stop the acquisition on grounds of national concern. In the case of IBM PCD, this occurred despite the friendly engagement established by both managements that led to the deal, whereas in the case of Anheuser-Busch the national opposition was actively rallied by CEO August Busch. Fourth, in both cases efforts were made to invoke differences in national ideological interests. In Lenovo’s case, this was based on concerns over “national security” by pointing to the shareholding of the Chinese government in the company. In InBev’s case, CEO Busch pointed to its business with Cuba. Fifth, in both cases these efforts had concrete implications. The Lenovo deal was delayed to allow for a full foreign investigation (CFIUS) review, whereas InBev had to raise its offer by $4 billion. Furthermore, leaders in both acquiring firms announced that they would keep their headquarters in the US, and in Lenovo’s case, they also announced that English would be the official language in the new organization. Crucially, media accounts of both cases were grounded in metonymies wherein elements of the US, China, and Belgium, came to stand for the organizations or their activities.

The Empirical Material

Our analysis focused on media texts. The premise is that the popular press is a key site wherein representations shape the understanding of organization and management practices. This is particularly the case with M&As (Fitzgibbon and Seeger, 2002; Fürsich, 2002; Koller, 2005). Media accounts discuss events of interest, often citing ‘experts’ and the ‘public’ on a given topic. This is subsequently framed through angles of salience, including national significance (Tienari et al., 2003). Thus, media texts constitute a rich repository of language about organizations. Furthermore, journalistic writing often involves metonymy which makes it a rich source of illustrations of our topic. For example, since newspaper headlines need to attract the attention of readers and urge them to continue with the article, journalists draw on metonymic patterns to pinpoint their topic (Faeyerts and Brône, 2005).

In developing the body of texts to be analysed, we drew on extensive media accounts from sources in the languages relevant to the national affiliation of the organizations in both cases. We included 1075 texts altogether, 506 on Lenovo-IBM PCD and 569 on InBev-AB. These were in English (476 on both cases), Chinese (330 on the Lenovo-IBM PCD acquisition) as well as French and Dutch (132 and 137, respectively, on the InBev-A-B acquisition). The selection of media sources was based on coverage – both prominence and breadth of distribution in the respective geographical area. This incorporated sources of general interest as well as
business focus, including industry specific publications. The English-language sources included BusinessWeek, Financial Times, Fortune, New York Times, Newsweek, The Economist, The Guardian, The Independent, Time, Wall Street Journal, and specialist sources such as ComputerWorld, Federal Computer Week and Marketing Week. Chinese-language sources included 21st Century Business Report, China Business, China Business Post, China Computer World, Hong Kong Economic Times, Lian He Zao Bao, Liberation Daily, People’s Daily and Southern Weekend. The Belgian material included the most widely circulated and read media sources in Belgium across two languages, French and Dutch. This included La Libre Belgique, Le Point, Le Soir and L’Echo in French and De Standaard, De Tijd Het Laatste Nieuws and Het Nieuwsblad in Dutch. We also included texts from the two main agencies, Reuters and Agence France Presse. Altogether, the corpus contained a broad range of media texts, representative of the different ways in which journalists write about organizations. This allowed us to make observations on particular national metonymies and their connection to metaphor.

Analysis

Our research approach was abductive, involving constant movement between theory and case material (Van Maanen et al. 2007). Accordingly, theoretical ideas were developed alongside increasingly accurate mapping of the national metonymies in the cases. This led us to distinguish their various forms, which are summarised in Table 1. We started with the English texts. The first overarching category we worked with was Entity-for-those-Involved from cognitive linguistic studies. Terms denoting entities stand metonymically for the people or for subsets that constitute them (Deignan, 2005). This was further developed as Organization-for-those-Involved by Cornelissen (2008). It is the basis of frequently used expressions in acquisitions where the organization stands for the managers involved, e.g.:

**Lenovo’s gambit paid off this week; the company announced it will purchase the IBM business for $1.25 billion, plus $500 million of assumed liabilities [English].**

Guided by this initial category, we set out to identify nation metonyms relevant to international M&As. Following Cornelissen (2008), the coding scheme was guided by replacement tests. For example, if an appearance of ‘China’ could be replaced by ‘people in China’, it was coded as nation-for-people:

1. The move, he added, would demonstrate China’s desire to take that next step toward economic maturity by investing abroad instead of merely serving as a manufacturing hub for the rest of the world.

Similarly, a capital city can stand for a nation’s government (Childers and Hentzi, eds., 1995):
2. In fact, cut-throat competition at home is at least as responsible for driving Chinese firms overseas as Beijing’s grand vision.

Next, we identified nation-for-organizations metonymy whereby nations stand for institutions or organizations within them, e.g. America for organizations in the US:

3. Buying America the Chinese way [title]

We then discovered that national metonymy builds – or effectively ‘piggybacks’ – on organizational metonymy and compresses two levels of metonymy into one. This complex construct is double metonymy. A national entity stands for organizations which, in turn, stand for their members. This constitutes nation-for-organizational-members metonymy:

4. China Abroad; Big Chinese companies have recently made or are considering lots of foreign acquisitions [Subheading]

Next we moved to a second overarching category, Thing-for-its-Idea, or ‘metonymic national identifiers’. Metonymy serves to render abstract ideas more tangible, so things stand for the ideas associated with them (crown for monarchy) (Preminger and Brogan, 1993). National buildings stand for the institutional leadership of a population (5), while national symbols and artefacts stand for national identity or culture (6):

5. In the past four years, the Republican Party has been very united. The members of Congress who belong to this party always stand on the same side as the White House.

6. Bud is just stars and stripes in a bottle

Colour also stands for the ideas it represents (Verspoor and de Bie-Kerékjártó, 2006). Colours are associated with nations, as in red, white and blue for the US from its flag:

7. The company uses red, white and blue as its colours... A current ad declares that its beer is a “Great American Lager”.

The hand is a common metonym with a variety of connotations (Ahn and Kwon, 2007). The term, in/into (certain) hands, stands for control (Moran, 2005). Relevant here is its deployment for national signification (American hands), or as foreign hands:

8. [Signatures collected] from those determined that an American icon such as Budweiser should not fall into foreign hands.

Lastly, a proper name and persona is used for a class of people, a national collective that shares similar cultural attributes. Here, Joe stands for the average person (man) in the US:

9. Bid for brewery is out of average Joe’s league.
By coding and categorizing the material along these lines, we made inferences about the forms of metonymy across different textual contexts. Abductive analysis is challenging as it requires constant iteration between theory, data and coding. Furthermore, the meaning in metonymy – as well as tropes generally – is often complex and ambiguous. Hence, there was a need to place specific metonymies in their broader intertextual and social context.

Table 1 – Forms of national metonymy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metonymy category</th>
<th>Stands…</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entity</strong></td>
<td>…for those involved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation</td>
<td>leaders or population</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>government or leaders</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation</td>
<td>organizations or institutions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation (double metonymy)</td>
<td>organizational members</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thing</strong></td>
<td>…for its idea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National buildings</td>
<td>national leadership</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National icons/artefacts</td>
<td>national identity, sovereignty, culture</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National colours</td>
<td>national identity or ideology</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands</td>
<td>ownership and control</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name and personae</td>
<td>national collective in politics or consumption</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The use of a large, substantive body of media texts enabled us to address our next objective, gauging the frequency of particular metonymies and verifying the roles they played in media texts (Locke, 2007). To do so, we examined the metonymic patterns identified across all media texts in English and in the other three languages relevant for the respective cases, namely Chinese, French and Dutch. These were analysed by research assistants (other than the two co-authors) whose first language was the one under analysis, and so they provided the intimate contextual knowledge needed during coding.

We used the categories we had identified in the English texts and worked with four research assistants (one for each of the respective languages) whose role was to code instances of national metonymy against each sub-category. They coded to written instructions (Krippendorff and Bock, 2008) that incorporated the metonymy replacement test (Cornelissen, 2008). Initially, they coded each publication (in the language analysed), then totalled the findings against each code. Finally, we totalled all instances of national metonymy across the four languages, and calculated percentages for each code of that total. To ensure the reliability of the analysis, checks were built into the coding process. One of the co-authors was the expert...
coder for English and worked with the research assistants. Although a research assistant did the bulk of the coding for each language, the project involved two people proficient in each of the languages. Four sessions of cross-checking were organized to check pairwise agreement on coding between research assistants across the languages. Where questions arose, the examples were translated into English with an opinion on the coding sought from the co-author. There were 26 instances of non-agreement on a code after discussion; these were excluded from the study. Last but not least, for the purpose of including interesting examples from languages other than English, translators were given the full-text of the case material in their respective languages. The fact that translators independently selected examples against each category that corresponded to the coding performed by the research assistants also served as triangulation for the reliability of the coding (Krippendorf and Bock, 2008). Altogether, we worked with 3616 instances of national metonymies across the two cases.

In defining the boundary conditions for the study (Locke, 2007), it is relevant to note that since the categories were initially developed from the English language texts, the analysis of the texts in other languages mainly verified these categories and identified frequencies in each (i.e. used the established coding scheme from English). The caveat here is that the Chinese, Dutch and French languages may offer further categories of national metonymy beyond those identified in this study. We also note that the analysis is not exhaustive of all the metonymic themes that could be gleaned from the media sources. Our aim has been to develop analytical generalizations (Tsoukas, 1989) about the role of national metonymy in international M&As.

NATIONAL METONYMIES IN INTERNATIONAL M&AS

The analysis of the frequency and functions of national metonymy was categorised under its two main forms: ‘nation metonyms’ and ‘metonymic national identifiers’. In the former, the name of a nation (e.g. America, China) or its capital stands for its leaders, population, organizations or their members. In the latter, the name of a tangible element (through which people identify with a nation) stands for the intangible idea associated with it (e.g. flag for sovereignty). The findings are summarized in Table 2. We identified 3226 instances of nation metonyms (89.2% of the total), and 390 instances of metonymic national identifiers (11.8% of total). These numbers suggest that national metonymies are generally significant in media accounts of international M&As. While nation metonyms are prevalent, their functions are subtle and could easily go un-noticed. On the other hand, whereas metonymic national identifiers are of considerably lower frequency, their symbolism renders them evocative.
### Table 2 – Frequencies of national metonymy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of metonymies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entity for those involved</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation for leaders or population</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital for government or leaders</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation for organizations or institutions</td>
<td>1588</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation for organizational members (double metonymy)</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td>3226</td>
<td>89.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thing for its idea</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National buildings for leadership or population</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National icons/artefacts for identity, sovereignty, culture</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National colours for identity or ideology</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands for ownership and control</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Names-personae for national collective</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SUBTOTAL</strong></td>
<td>390</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Metonymy Total</strong></td>
<td>3616</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

**Entity-for-those-involved national metonymy: the mundane matters**

In this section, our concern is with national metonymy whose role as a figure of speech is disguised by familiarity. Focus is on mundane – commonplace and everyday – nation metonyms that often do not attract attention. Altogether, the use of national entity-for-those-involved is widespread, but such extensive repetition normalizes the metonyms and masks their role. Two points are worth noting: (a) common metonyms feed “the tendency to absorb without questioning” (Matus, 1988: 307) and (b) national identity is often mobilized through the banal (Billig, 1995). Hence, these familiar nation metonyms warrant scrutiny and closer examination (what Oswick et al., 2004, term “exposing resonance”) to unmask their role in reproducing cultural differences and stereotypes. In what follows, we report on the frequency for each of the sub-categories and discuss how these interact with, and build on, organizational metonymy.

First, we identified 951 instances of metonymy in which a nation stands for its leaders or members of its population (Nation-for-People metonymy), representing 26.3% of the total. This suggests that even though the texts are about an organizational activity, invocation of the nation is widespread:

*Congress assumes that China is rude and impolite to it. As such, Congress has a reason to closely check the processes of this acquisition [Chinese].*
For the last Super Bowl alone... 24 million dollars were devoted to preaching the virtues of ‘America’s beer’ [French].

**Budweiser** could pay price for being ‘America’s beer’ [Title, English]

In the top example, *China* stands for the country’s leaders or for groups of its people. In the following two, *America* or *the US* stands for the population. ‘America’s beer’ is a statement that had been used to promote Budweiser. In such an expression, the complexity of a large population is compressed into a single entity that can have its favourite beer. Such reduction in complexity can also be noted in this example:

_Bud, though, is held back in many markets by its image of Eighties, good-times Americana, unsuited these days to a world where many view the US with suspicion... [says Futurebrand strategy director Adrian Goldthorpe]... “We’ve fallen out of love with the US, compared with 15 years ago when it appeared fun and exciting” [English]._

Rather, than a complex population, *the US* as metonym reduces diversity to a single entity that is the simple object of action (rather than agent), trusted or suspected, loved or unloved.

Second, there were 98 instances of metonymy wherein a salient city stands for those involved, such as national government (*Washington* for the US government or *Beijing* for the Chinese government). Whereas this is a low percentage overall (2.7%), capitals are invoked to signify national political concern and add gravity to the text. Examples include:

_By making Lenovo the world’s third-largest computer maker, the $1.3 billion sale would draw China more tightly into global economic interdependence and raise the price of any Beijing aggression [English]._

_The US Justice Department is also said to fear that the potential acquisition could aid Beijing’s espionage efforts [English]._

Third, nation-for-organizations/s held the highest frequency by far: 1588 instances, representing 43.9%. This suggests that the *nation* repeatedly stands for the respective organization:

_Another difficulty of the merger is around international employees; currently, the team from China and the team from America still need to communicate frequently [Chinese]._

_Here, China and America are used for Lenovo and IBM, respectively. The following, in turn, hold deployments of the famous Budweiser advertising statement “This Bud’s for you”:_

**This Bud’s for EU** [Title; English]

**Is this Bud for Belgium?** [Title; English]
Bud stands for the organization, A-B, in a Product-for-Producer metonomy. Simultaneously, “you” is replaced with the like-sounding EU, or Belgium, so that the region or country stands for the respective organization (InBev) as new owner – even though InBev is neither exclusively European nor Belgian. Metonymy enables reduction, rendering big, complex ideas more accessible (Burke, 1969b; Stuckey and Antczak, 1994). Acts of reduction and simplification, even if very subtle, are needed to enable the polarization of national cultures. For example, the complexity of the Belgian-Brazilian ownership of InBev when reduced to ‘Belgian’, and ‘Belgium’, enables the formulation of a crystallized antagonist to ‘American’ and ‘America’. This category is also deployed to poignant effect when the nation replaces the organization as the object of transactions as in the following:

...Ike Hunley, a systems programmer at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida Inc. in Jacksonville, said he was dismayed by IBM’s move, which he called “just more selling off of America... piece by piece” [English].

The Chinese way of buying America... America is not ready psychologically... America has anger, but can not do much about it [Chinese].

The proposed sale of the maker of the beer that bills itself as “great American lager,” to a Belgian firm has become a rallying point for some Bud fans and lawmakers playing to the populist view that America is being sold off, bit by bit [English].

Nation metonyms here include selling off of America (for its organizations) and the Chinese way of buying the US (for its organizations) from the Lenovo/IBM PCD acquisition as well as America is being sold off bit by bit from the InBev/A-B acquisition. iv

Fourth, there is nation-for-organizational-members (double metonymy) for which we identified 589 instances, that is 16.2%. An example is the use of China in the following:

[He] admits: “Because of culture and language differences, they [American SMEs] don’t like doing business with China.” [Chinese]

The expression doing business with [a country] is particularly relevant because it is common in everyday English. A nation becomes a metonym for its organizations and, in turn, for their members. Such double metonymy can also be extended to a region as in this example from the Lenovo-IBM texts:

East meets West, big-time [Title, English]

Here, East and West signify global regions that are metonyms for nations, China and the US, respectively. In turn, the latter are not only metonyms for the merging organizations, but
also for their people. This becomes apparent through the following example, a statement that appears later in the article:

The culture gap is huge. For instance, the Chinese Lenovo members don’t tolerate being tardy for meetings, while IBMers are often late [English].

This conflates national affiliation (the Chinese) with organizational practices (of IBMers). Thus, to fully comprehend metonymy, one needs contextual understanding. This includes familiarity with the deployment of the terms East and West not simply as directions on a compass, but also as areas of the world conceptualised through a lattice of differences:

The only way those changes will come is for the West to continue to engage China commercially, culturally and politically [English].

As this example illustrates, the West stands metonymically for several nations, but specifically the US, whereas China stands metonymically for multiple constituents: its leaders, its organizations, and its people. It needs to be emphasised that the terms East and West are not neutral. For example, one side is potentially labelled or constructed as somehow ‘inferior’ while the other side is rendered ‘superior’. The following example associates West with iconic technology and East with ambitious novices:

…the first major merger between an American company and a Chinese one is creating a true blend of East and West, of tech icon and industry upstart... [English]

The compression of national and organizational affiliation is also strong in the InBev/A-B case – as in the following examples:

Never mind the Chinese – here come the Belgians [Subtitle]

...the immediate public outcry at this foreign assault on the country’s King of Beers come as no surprise, even if Belgians are a lot less scary than the Chinese to Joe Couchpotatoe [English].

This bud may be for the Belgians [title, English]

Bud beer goes Belgian [English].

Here, InBev is replaced with Belgian(s) who are the agents that conduct a foreign assault, are a lot less scary than the Chinese and who can now claim Bud. In the last example, however, Bud, in place of A-B, becomes the agent that goes Belgian. This simplified image of changing nationality (InBev is not purely Belgian) transposes the unpopular action from managers to an organizational metonym (a theme to which we return later in the paper).

Metonymy reduces complexity by eclipsing the intricacies of activities and/or entities. We focus on two of its functions: emotive framing and stereotyping (Stuckey and Antczak,
First, national metonymy’s reductive effects enable the depiction of emotions that are central to generating national cultural differences. Here we offer two modes with which this unfolds. The first is through invoking a sense of territorial threat and potential loss. National-level metonymic substitution offers examples of emotive framing of acquisition transactions, wherein actors are viewed as ‘buying’ and ‘selling’ nations rather than organizations. In both cases, representatives of the public or consumers are cited in disappointment over selling America. Such nation-for-organization metonymy reduces a complex series of international acquisitions by myriad overseas investors to the singular act of selling/buying ‘America’. This both homogenises the parts (organizations) into the whole (nation) and substitutes the latter for the former as the object of transactions. Such object shifting, that of selling a country (here, America), is a highly emotive act of betrayal.

Second, in compressing ‘organization’ and ‘nation’, metonymy reduces organizational complexity. Specificities of the organization are masked under simplified national-level frames. This conceals the diversity of individuals and organizations, and homogenizes the pluralism in various societies and their businesses – a key dynamic in stereotyping (Lakoff, 1987). Hence, national metonym offers a central way through which common assumptions about national cultural differences and stereotypes are automatically reproduced. Since this type of metonymy is hidden by its familiarity, it has implications for representation.

One implication is that stereotypical attitudes towards a nation are extended to organizations. In such situations, metonymy reduces complexity selectively: it eclipses many cultural attributes and attitudes, while highlighting a specific one. For example, expressions such as falling out of love with the US or fear of China draw broader stereotypes into language about organizations. Such statements are reductive on two facets: they imply that everyone on one side shares the attitude and that everyone on the other side shares the attributes that drive such attitudes. More commonly, everyday management language includes expressions like doing business with China (or any other nation), wherein nations replace their organizations and respective members. In such statements, the potential plurality of experiences with organizations in that country are reduced to one set of experiences and implicitly generalized. However, there is also another implication. Experiences with organizations are actually experiences with organizational members (double metonymy). Hence, individual variations in business practices are compressed and homogenized into a national entity, thereby stereotyping organizational members. In such situations, organizational members are often signified by nationality (Chinese, Belgian, American) rather than organizational affiliation. This facilitates attachment of generalizations to them (The Chinese don’t like being tardy).
Thing-for-its-Idea national metonymy: the salience of metonymic national identifiers

Metonymic processes reduce complex incorporeal states to less complex corporeal states (Burke 1969b) – e.g. reducing love to heart (Moran, 2005). In this section, the interest is in national corporeal ‘things’ that stand for the ideas associated with them, and the relevance of these metonyms to organization. The role of artefacts is widely recognized in the literature on culture (e.g. Schein, 1985) as well as national identity (e.g. Billig, 1995). Objects or other corporeal states reinforce identity, defining how ‘us’ differ from ‘them’, and thereby distinguish the ‘familiar’ from the ‘foreign’. ‘Metonymic national identifiers’ are symbolic terms that are evocative through their salience. Salience, in turn, is a key factor in defining which bits of experience count, and it is closely tied with what we find important in our environment (Verspoor and de Bie-Kerékjártó, 2006). Collectively, the instances across this category stand at 390, or 10.8% of the total. However, these metonymies entwine salient national icons with organizations, their members or their products, and so hold considerable functional relevance in texts on international M&As.

First, in examining national icons, the White House stands for US presidency. Whereas this is not high in frequency (17 instances or 0.5%), it results in national political resonance that signifies the highest level of national engagement in an organizational activity:

Approval of the deal – the first billion-dollar purchase in the U.S. by a mainland Chinese company – reinforces the administration’s commitment to economic engagement with China… The White House is leaning on Beijing to help curb North Korea’s nuclear ambitions [English].

The second sub-category, national artefacts, is the one with the highest frequency within metonymic national identifiers. There were 207 instances or 5.7% of the total. National symbols and artefacts such as flags are generally relevant metonyms. However, in these cases, an interesting and relevant finding is that some organizational products become national icons and play a role in shaping national identity. Relevant here is ‘Americana’, established both through everyday commodities (e.g. apple pie) and certain branded commodities (e.g. Coca Cola). Brands with metonymic power in the US industry can then be extended to the nation. Some organizations – either by actively promoting their products through national frames (A-B) or by becoming part of a historical litany of national business success stories (IBM) – become icons of that nation. In Budweiser’s case, this is exemplified through the following wherein cowboy features double grounding, both iconic of Americana and standing for a US product (Marlboro):

The brand is to the beer what the cow-boy is to the cigarette [French].
In this case, Budweiser, the beer brand often described as “an American icon”, is deployed as a metonym for Anheuser-Busch (product-for-producer), and is symbolic of the US:

**InBev is going for American symbol** [Title, Dutch]

Bud is also entwined with other metonymic identifiers, such as the flag for national sovereignty: it is *stars and stripes in a bottle* (cited earlier), and when InBev is successful in its acquisition, this warrants…

**Toasting on the stars and stripes** [Title, Dutch]

Here, *toasting* features double-grounding in celebrating, and the beer business acquired. Turning to other icons, A-B’s *Clydesdales* are threatened with replacement by *Belgian ponies*:

“*Having the Anheuser-Busch Clydesdales being replaced with two Belgian ponies and a cart filled with beer does not thrill me,*” [Kit Bond] said. [English]

Bud is associated with further metonymic national identifiers such as *the flag in the background, baseball and apple pie*:

*Featuring the American flag in the background, SaveAB.com sees the InBev bid as an attack on the American way of life. “My fellow Americans like baseball, apple pie and ice cold beer (wrapped in a red, white and blue label)…” it says [English].*

Third, there were 51 instances of colour metonymies (1.4%). While colour metonymies are broad in range, encompassing objects, emotions, race, etc., they are particularly relevant as metonymic national identifiers since they stand for flags or political ideologies. An example of the former is *red, white and blue* for the US:

... *Budweiser is an American icon: its Clydesdale horses are fixtures of Super Bowl ads, and even the label is red, white and blue, with an eagle swooping through the A for Anheuser-Busch.* [English]

Here, the national colours for the USA (derived from its flag) are simultaneously extended to Budweiser and A-B. The colours are represented with the *eagle*, another national icon for the USA. These provide vivid examples of how metonymic connections often do not simply ‘happen’ (Matus, 1988), but are actively invoked. Colours can also stand for national ideology:

*When the once-red China takes a bite out of Big Blue, it looks like a rite of passage for the mainland* [English].

Here, the *red* in “once-red China” stands for communism rather than China’s flag since it is located in the past. Simultaneously, however, *China* stands as a metonym for Lenovo that acquired *Big Blue*. The latter is itself a metonym for IBM derived from the blue colour of its
corporate branding. The strong contrast generated by deploying the terms *red* and *blue* here lends the entities strong connotations of difference, wittily exploited to enable national contrasts. In the following, the contrast is extended metonymically to assign Lenovo a new name, *Big Red*:

**Big Red**, as Lenovo is now known thanks to its purchase of *Big Blue’s* PC arm, snapped up the business for $1.75 billion... [English]

Yet, when people name something ‘red’ or ‘blue’, they are not naming an objective entity in the world, they are naming the ways in which they conceptualise an entity at a certain time and place, and thereby demonstrating the “bits of experience that count” (Verspoor and de Bie-KerékJártó, 2006). Metonymy rests on familiarity for its interpretation (one needs to know that communism is denoted by red), so cultural specificity is important. The following is a rare occurrence of *red* in Chinese media accounts of the acquisition through the term “Big Red”:

*The gain and loss from “Big Blue” to “Big Red”* [Title, Chinese]

Unlike its connotation in the English example, red here denotes happiness – as it commonly does in Chinese cultures. In doing so, the statement subverts the meaning of *Big Red* as used in the English language. vii

Ideological construction both precedes the metonymic mapping and is reinforced by it (Burke, 1969a; Eubanks, 2001; Stuckey and Antczak, 1994). Accordingly, the deployment of metonyms often holds implicit and normative evaluations. For example, the historical term *redskin* for Native American was extended metonymically from the perceived red colouration of skin (Geeraerts, 2002), but moved from being common to distasteful, and then to offensive – due to its association with prejudice and stereotype. The colour *yellow* in the following invokes historical racial prejudice to describe reaction to Lenovo’s acquisition:

*America fears economy is experiencing the ‘yellow peril’* [Title, Chinese]

The role of value systems is well recognized in the merger literature on cultural differences (Buono et al., 1985). Simultaneously, ideological construction is central to national identity (Freeden, 1998), and ideological invocation through metonymy can be more powerful than explicit persuasion (Burke, 1969a). Hence, the reproduction of national metonymic identifiers is entwined with the reproduction of ideological differences. For example, ‘red’ was also used when efforts were made to invoke ideological discord between InBev and the US:

*Anheuser raises red flag over InBev’s Cuba unit* [Title, English]
Here, *red flag* stands both for communism and danger (see metaphor section). This sometimes leads to strong contrasts in the frames generated by the media portraying the different sides and which render the acquisition as either a threat or an opportunity. For example, the acquiring organization’s association with “red China” or “Cuba” is posed as a potential threat. This becomes particularly salient when the ‘target’ is a national icon – such as IBM or Bud – that is entwined with other national icons (*stars and stripes*, etc.).

Fourth, there were 92 occurrences of the subcategory *hands* or 2.5% of the total. The reductive and corporeal function of the common metonym *foreign hands* succinctly both represents and enables wariness of the ‘foreign’. Depiction of a struggle for national control is exemplified through the use of *hands* in the following:

*Hands off our Bud* [title]

_Could anything symbolize America’s loss of economic supremacy more clearly than for its favourite beer to fall into foreign hands?_ ... _Already, the Jacksonville Business Journal has found 80% of respondents in its online survey wanted Anheuser-Busch to remain in American hands* [English].

In *hands off our Bud*, our stands for Americans in place of A-B shareholders. In the examples, the *American icon* sits uncomfortably in *foreign hands*, which signify a threat to *America*. Here, metonymy enables emotive framing through ‘stranger danger’, a polarization of the foreign/familiar through suspicion of the ‘other’. Complex series of transactions by myriad investors are reduced and rendered corporeal through the widely deployed term *foreign hands* in which ‘foreign’ is defined through nation. An implicitly negative receptacle, transfer to these ‘hands’ often involves loss. They are not friendly – they are represented as a *predator’s hands*, reference is made to *clutches*, and they are associated with *attack* that threatens to wrest organizations from their rightful nation. Their agent is suspected of devious intentions such as cutting jobs or closing plants, and thus the cry of *hands off* is warranted. Important here is that through the dialogic constitution of meaning (Eubanks, 2001), ‘foreign is dangerous’ silently invokes its opposite: ‘familiar is safe’ (*a safe pair of hands, American hands*).

Fifth, metonymy’s role in rendering the abstract in corporeal terms is relevant in this subcategory, wherein a named person stands for the national population in discussion. Altogether, there were 23 occurrences (0.6%) of such salient national caricatures. In accounts of the InBev/A-B acquisition, American consumers of A-B’s beer are described through the metonym *Joe Six-pack* or *Joe Couchpotatoe*. The common term, *Joe*, represents all consumers of beer (through the contiguity of “six-pack” and “couch”):
Talk of sale of Bud brewer rankles ‘Joe Sixpack’ [Title] More than any other beer, Bud is an American icon… [English]

Metonymy’s reductive function here potentially stereotypes consumers within a national collective. As Joe, they all appear to be uniformly rankled by prospects of the acquisition. Joe even made it to Dutch titles, as the defeated national antagonist that had resisted the acquisition:

The end of Joe Sixpack? [Title, Dutch]

Examples of Joe featured in the A-B/InBev acquisition, but not in the Lenovo/IBM-PCD case. It may be that average Joe is into his beer and Bud shares contiguity with everyday living – whereas IBM-PCD is contiguous to executives and knowledge workers.

In another form of this metonymy, a salient real-life character stands for the characteristics of a national subsection:

Bud… needs to tap into the pleasant side of the US. It has tended to be a bit George W Busch, while it needs to be more Barack Obama [English]

Here, each president stands as an archetype for a segment of the US population. Metonymic characterization can also stand for the whole nation. Uncle Sam is a national personification of the US or its government (the term shares the same acronym ‘US’ with the country). In images, his clothes signify the colours and symbols of the American flag. Historically based on an actual man, the metonym dates back to the early 19th century and has often been invoked in war situations. Uncle Sam features in accounts of both acquisitions:

Right now, Uncle Sam can kill a deal only for national security, not economic, reasons [English]

Critics of Bud buyout are frothing [title]… Uncle Sam’s hands are tied [subtitle, English]

The latter wittily invokes both beer and anger through frothing, but then proceeds to explain that potential top-level national intervention is constrained – it cannot do anything to appease the public outcry. Through Uncle Sam, the reader is also offered an example of a nation operating as a person, a combination of metaphor and metonymy to which we now turn.

NATIONAL METONYMY-METAPHOR COMBINATIONS IN M&As

In what follows, we address our second question: In what ways are national metonymies connected to metaphoric expressions in media texts on international M&As? Altogether, there were 1262 instances of metonymy-and-metaphor combinations. Through closer examination, we
identified three overarching categories: national metonymy and metaphor in composite images, metonymy-based metaphoric wit, and metonymy-metaphor combinations with irony.

Images deploying national metonymy and metaphor combinations

First, in its simplest form, an image involves the deployment of nation-for-organization-and/or-its-members within a metaphor:

*The technological rise of China was speedy... [Title; English]*

*America has had fears of the rising China for a long time. Right now, seeing Chinese companies cross borders to acquire famous American brands, it is naturally easy for them to have the illusion of China as an approaching wolf that is going to hunt them down [Chinese].*

The deployment of *China* for its organizations and people enables its conceptualization as an entity that can *rise* metaphorically. *Rising China* (at times *China rising*) is a common term in accounts of, and in, China. It is entwined with a common trope based on vertical orientation (more is up, less is down) (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Faeyerts and Brône, 2005). The national grounding is evocative when emotion is attributed to a nation rather than to specific people within it – as in the latter example above. In such cases, a country – here *America* – stands for some of its people, metonymically rendered a single entity that can *fear*. The description of such emotion is then strengthened when juxtaposed against *China as an approaching wolf*.

Second, in more sophisticated constructs of metonymy-and-metaphor, the overall metaphoric frame deploys metonymies within it for stronger effect:

*The theme in Washington last week was “Return of the Red Menace,” as a hostile bid for Unocal by China National Offshore Oil Corp.’s CNOOC Ltd. set off a frenzy of finger-pointing, calls for sanctions, legislation to block the deal and, in general, a wave of militant Sinophobia [English].*

Here, the *Return of the Red Menace* is a metaphor for the concern over acquisition attempts by Chinese firms of organizations in the US. The strength of that metaphoric frame is derived from the emotive historical association with the metonym *red* for communism. Here it is worth noting the mutually motivating and reinforcing relationship between metonymy and metaphor. The ideological and metaphorical frame motivates the deployment of metonymy. The metonym in turn reinforces the strength of the frame.

Third, in complex deployment, the metaphor relies on metonymy for its grounding:

*China tries its wings as a global investor [Title; English]*
Here, *China* is deployed for organizations, enabling it to become a single entity. The metaphor of a bird that *tries its wings* is then constructed on that initial metonymic step. In such cases, the metonymic treatment of entity for-for-those-involved crystallizes the conception of that entity (here nation) as an individual unit and therefore facilitates metaphors based on activities by single actors. To illustrate, we return to this earlier example:

> When the once-red *China* takes a bite out of *Big Blue*, it looks like a rite of passage for the *mainland*. Even so, it is *IBM* that looks the smarter ... [English]

It includes metonyms (*red* for communism, *China* for Lenovo, *Big Blue* for IBM, *mainland* for China), but it also presents the reader with metaphors that rely on individual action. Metaphoric activities attributed to individuals include *takes a bite*, undergoes a *rite of passage* and *looks the smarter*. In the last, even though it is the managers working at IBM whose decisions are smart, the deployment of *IBM*, an organization, in their place renders it metaphorically like a smart person (Cornelissen, 2008), indeed one so smart that they can outsmart a whole country. At times, such metonymic treatment is very subtle:

> *America* is a fisherman who is good at hunting the *Dragon*; in contrast, *he* is getting really scared. Who can understand the reasons for that? [Chinese]

Here, *he*, a brief word, metonymically enables the attribution of emotion, *scared*, to a country as a singular entity, thereby subverting its prowess at *hunting the Dragon* stated earlier. This last category, metaphor from metonymy, is the commonest. Hence, the findings of national metonymy confirm Cornelissen’s (2008) findings in relation to organizations.

We now focus on how accounts that couple metaphor with metonymy render a commercial investment into an inter-national confrontation. War is linked with national encounters. Simultaneously, images of war are dominant in accounts of organizational acquisitions (Boyd, 2003; Cummings and Riad, 2007; Koller, 2005; Vaara et al., 2003). Metonymy enables the two domains to intersect by extending the confrontation from organizations to nations. Simultaneously, war functions as a ‘megametaphor’, an extended and powerful metaphor that circulates frequently and which enables people to account for events and explain them. Megametaphors offer iconic expressions that stand for individual and collective experiences. They are also closely tied in with the symbolic order in society and with inter-cultural meaning. So they “define friend and foe, same and other, here and there” (Luke, 2004: 238).

The three combinations of metonymy-and-metaphor are entwined to formulate evocative images of inter-national confrontation in the InBev/A-B acquisition through the depiction of war. The deployment of war metonymy-and-metaphor featured intertextual resonance across the
English, French and Dutch languages: “attack”/“defence”, “invasion”/“resistance”, “conquest”/“salvation”, “siege” and ultimate “fall”, followed by “mourning”. To start with, the simplified Belgian ‘nationality’ of the beer or its brewer is repeatedly invoked. The following signifies the threat of displacement by deploying Belgian in place of American in A-B’s descriptor “The Great American Lager”. The former is metonymically rendered into Giant brewer InBev and so becomes capable of picking a fight:

**Budweiser, the great Belgian lager?[title]**

**Giant brewer InBev** wants to take over Anheuser-Busch, the company behind ‘the Great American Lager’, picking a fight with the Busch family and a lot of US beer drinkers [Subheading: English].

It is not the first time that the **Belgian brewer** attacks the Anheuser Busch empire [French].

However, national attack and defence also need a site, a battleground of national significance. Metonymy is powerfully rendered through a city that specifically locates and consolidates a fragmented experience (Sadler and Haskins, 2005). St. Louis offers the setting, the **fief**, as described by some sources, for the siege of the **King of Beers**:

The notion of the **King of Beers**, headquartered in St. Louis for nigh on a century and a half, falling into foreign hands has caused alarm, there is no doubt [English].

Meanwhile, InBev sets out in conquest of the United States, which stands for Americans, which stand for A-B:

**InBev in the conquest of Americans?** [Title] Could Inbev, the Belgo-Brazilian brewery group known in particular for Stella, leave for the conquest of the United States? [French]

On another front, A-B has been metonymically reduced to Bud(weiser), a singular national iconic entity. It is an American treasure or a ‘jewel’ of heritage that should be saved from the foreign invasion. Hence…

**Americans campaign to save Budweiser from the Belgians** [title]

...Urging Americans to “fight the foreign invasion of A-B,” the site asked them to sign the online petition to protect “this American treasure”… [English].

**Patriotic surge surrounding Bud** [title]

This call to resistance has already been signed by tens of thousands of Americans. It aims at tearing off Budweiser, a “jewel” of heritage, from its predator’s hands: the Belgo-Brazilian brewer InBev [French].

However, the ‘war’ carries on:
InBev will counter-attack in the USA [Title, French]

29 September is D-Day for InBev [Title, Dutch]

Ultimately:

Stella gets Bud; Busch falls to the Belgians [Title; English].

Then there is the aftermath:

Day of mourning in St. Louis, the fief of Bud [Title; French]

The combat will have lasted only one month. There is nothing left but to close the Internet site SaveBudweiser.com, created by passionate people who fought against the passage of “the” American beer under a foreign flag [French].

Altogether, metonymy locates the acquisition within the broader language of “trade is war” (Eubanks, 2001). It grounds the confrontational metaphor that situates organizations in an international struggle. Because the war megametaphor offers pervasive “ready-made, easy to use” modes of reasoning (Luke, 2004: 238), it serves as a script that anchors assumptions about activities, agents and appropriate behaviour. For example, the texts also invoke other historical national struggles, e.g. the Dyle (French – a Belgian location in World War II), D-Day and Independence Day (Dutch), Red Menace and Red Scare (English), and The Long March (Chinese – the massive military evasion undertaken by the Red Army when pursued by the Nationalists). Altogether, the metonymically grounded war imagery renders the acquisition a loss to one nation and a win to the other.

Metonymy-based metaphoric wit

Whereas national metonymy can reproduce cultural differences, it can also be used to resist them. Specifically, national metonymy is often deployed with metaphoric wit. This is enabled by the ambiguity that is common in metaphor-from-metonymy expressions (Deignan, 2005) and it is manipulated for effect in media texts. Fayaerts and Brône (2005) identify a strategy of conceptual integration where the innovative strength of metonymy is based on double grounding. The latter co-activates two interpretations to convey witty ambiguity, allowing one to play on meanings. Sometimes this is used to light-hearted effect:

China goes shopping [Title; English]

Here, the country stands for organizations and their members. This double metonymy enables the metaphoric wit of shopping for acquisitions, processes that also involve purchase. Fayaerts and Brône (2005) specifically emphasise what they call “witty newspaper headlines”. To gauge its extent, we examined all the titles of the articles analysed and identified that 195 of
them (or 18%) deployed wit. The double grounding that enables sophisticated deployment of metonymy in titles can be noted in the following:

Seeing red over Big Blue’s China Deal [Title; English]

In this illustration, red co-actives two metonymic interpretations: communism, and also anger. Seeing red is metonymically derived from the rush of blood to the brain, extended metaphorically to denote situations of anger (Lakoff, 1987). The statement directs the anger at the China Deal, wherein the country stands for Lenovo. We emphasise, however, that such wit is not limited to titles – as can be noted from the following:

...all CAS [Chinese Academy of Science] needs is 1.6% more of the voting share to take active managerial control over the board of Lenovo. That’s not protectionism – that’s a red flag! [English]

Here, red is metonymically exploited for double effect: red flag co-activates communism and China’s flag – as well as danger. The latter is metonymically derived from red flags positioned to indicate sites of danger, and then metaphorically extended to denote situations of danger more broadly (as in Cuba earlier). Metonymic co-activation is deployed to poignant effect in this example that quotes a line from a song written to stop the InBev/A-B acquisition:

* A local songwriter, Phil McClary, has written a song... “Don’t sell a slice of the American dream as history won’t forget” [English].

Here, sell co-actives two interpretations: its mundane usage in acquisitions and the negative connotation of ‘selling out’ part of one’s heritage. The American dream is a powerful metonym for national connectedness. Americans are joined by their faith in the American dream and warnings of the danger of losing it (Stuckey and Antczak, 1994). Here, its slice is Budweiser (standing for A-B), and selling it is akin to an act of treason that will not be forgotten by history, a metonym for the national population’s accounts of the act.

Another confrontational metaphor common in M&As is eating (Koller, 2005), and it was salient in both cases. An example from the Lenovo/IBM case:

* After all, Lenovo is a Chinese company – majority government-owned even – and it’s gobbling up a storied asset of the bluest American blue chip [English].

The predatory effect of gobbling up is heightened by the deployment of blue. Blue activates IBM’s metonym, Big Blue, but it also simultaneously deploys other connotations such as high value (blue chip) and national relevance (bluest American). This offers a prime example of situations wherein the expressive effect of wit is in its metonymic exploitation (Feyaerts and
Brône, 2005). Here, metonymy grounds the metaphor, enabling conceptualization of different recursive levels of ‘eating’: organizational and national (also note *takes a bite* above). The metonymic exploitation of the two levels can also be noted in the InBev/A-B case. Metonymy enables the metaphoric wit in:

Belgian-Brazilian brewer *InBev* is to swallow *Anheuser-Busch*… [English]

Here, conceptual integration is based on double grounding and co-activation of two interpretations: predatory national acquisition and drinking beer (the product). The witty grounding of the eating metaphor in national metonymy can also be noted in these titles:

*From now on, this Bud's for InBev; Belgian firm swallows U.S. brewer* [Title, English].

*China bytes* [Title, English]

In the latter, the metonym *China* (for its organizations) enables the double grounding of acquisition-as-eating and the computer industry through *bytes*. When the imagery of predatory eating is grounded in metonymy, it facilitates the depiction of national threat. Here we note that war and predatory imagery are not mutually exclusive. As Koller (2005) asserts, they are both grounded in Social Darwinism in its emphasis on struggle as central to survival. When introducing threat/survival, attack/resistance into a reduced conception of nation-for-organization, metonymy enables the portrayal of a struggle for survival at an inter-national level, wherein the perceived threat to the organization is depicted as a threat to the nation.

**Metonymy-and-metaphor composing frames of irony**

Whereas metonymy tends to reproduce common conceptions – such as cultural differences and stereotypes – this reproduction may also be resisted. Matus (1988) underlines that metonymy fixes meanings provisionally rather than definitively. One of the fascinating insights of this study is the role that irony plays with metonymy and metaphor. In organizational research, irony is a trope for dissonance or resistance (Oswick et al., 2002, 2004). To date, however, it has usually been examined separately. We argue that metonymy, metaphor and irony are not mutually exclusive, but can be combined to create disruptive statements that challenge the predominant stereotypical frames. The following title offers an example:

*Red scare or red herring?* [Title; English]

Here, *red* is a metonym for both communism and danger in *red scare*. The title then deploys a pun on *red* through the metaphor *red herring* that signifies diversion of attention. The two metaphors are combined to form ironic dissonance towards the potential danger posed by
nation-organization, and the second metaphor potentially subverts the first. This is a prime example for Oswick at al.’s (2002) suggestion that irony works by juxtaposing opposites, “creating a disjunction between the conventional image and the reality it represents”.

Such disjunction is at play in two occurrences of Great Leap Forward in Chinese titles:

*The new Lenovo: the challenge after the ‘Great Leap Forward’ [Title, Chinese]*

This refers to the historical social and economic plan in China which ended in widespread death and destruction, so in historical hindsight, the plan’s name was ironic. Since almost all texts in Chinese were affirming in their appraisal of the Lenovo deal, invoking this event suggests: think again – things may not be what they seem. The irony here deploys a national metaphoric frame that is grounded in entity-for-those-involved metonymy (since leap is an individual activity).

Irony can also be identified in the InBev/A-B case both in relation to the image of a Belgian threat and to representations of Budweiser’s standing as an American icon. In a satirical piece written as an imaginary diary entry by CEO Busch, the writer parodies attempts at depicting a threat to the nation by the acquisition, honing the satire on simplistic depictions of the Belgian-Brazilian affiliation of InBev:

*Of course there’s no basis in antitrust or (guffaw) “national security” for Washington to get involved and block the deal – if we want to be taken seriously as a country... At worst, they [politicians] help me run up the price on the Brazilian-Belgians (Belgilians)? [English]*

The term Belgilians is coined to parody attempts at reducing the national complexity of InBev. (*Washington* stands for the US government in a statement that implicitly invokes reactions to previous international acquisitions.) Parody is also at play in the following:

*Why they’re slingling mud over bud [title, English]; many opponents... simply don’t want a Belgian company touching a ‘nation brand’ like Budweiser*

*Slinging mud over bud* is a metaphor grounded in metonymy. Here, the writer juxtaposes consumer hate for Bud against the love that they are said to hold for it. By superimposing opposites, the statement illustrates how extreme affection results in enmity. Irony can also explicitly unmask the functions of metonymy by using metonymy. The following parodies the metonymic elevation of Bud to a national icon under attack:

*Let’s not get all weepy eyed over this. It’s a beer company, not the White House [English]*

Here, the organization’s literal descriptor (*beer company*) is juxtaposed against a physical symbol of national identity and sovereignty (*White House*) using thing-for-its-idea metonymy.
This unmasks metonymy’s function in the widespread accounts that elevate the acquisition’s status to national threat. The following example is also ironically rendered:

*What’s brewing; Eulogy for an American Bud he never liked [Title, English]*

*Bud* here wittily invokes ‘buddy’, an *American* who has ‘died’ (metaphor-from-metonymy depicting A-B’s sale). This sombre dramatization is immediately ironically subverted through the phrase *he never liked*. Such prompt departure from the convention of Eulogy, implicitly reminds the reader that Bud is simply a beer, and not everyone in the nation would have appreciated it. The ironic treatment of Bud as an American under threat is also noted in:

*Bud’s last Independence Day? [Title, Dutch]*

When writing ironically, authors use whatever linguistic measures are available to them, and sometimes the simple question mark does the job. This question subverts the many descriptions in English of how the acquisition marks over a hundred years of ‘independence’. It invokes national *Independence Day* which *Bud*, the American, is about to celebrate for the last time. By questioning this, the text parodies the representation of new ownership.

Altogether, there were 24 occurrences of metonymically grounded irony. Whereas this is not extensive, sometimes exceptions matter as much as the rule. There are always other factors that can alter entrenched meanings and prevent their closure. So metonymy, when used ironically, can discourage the fixity of cultural differences and subvert them. This is particularly relevant since ironic statements reflect *both* the user’s awareness of the emotive and stereotypical cultural dynamics underway *as well as* their attempt to change these frames by using contradiction – or dissonance. Hence, irony offers a rhetorical means of intervention in intercultural management generally, and M&As specifically, by undermining the polarization of national identities and the fear of national cultural differences.

**DISCUSSION**

The premise of this paper is that metonymy is not a neutral linguistic device; but a central discursive resource for the construction of national identities and cultural differences in accounts of international M&As. Our work contributes to organizational and management theory by defining the forms and functions of national metonymy relevant to such dynamics. In doing so, we introduce a new theoretical perspective on the formulation of national cultural differences. In what follows, we theorise how cultural differences are instantiated in and through national metonyms. We discuss how the latter serve to generate emotive frames and stereotypes, but also enable the play on meanings that overturns and resists such cultural stereotyping.
The overarching theoretical insight from this study is that national cultural differences are constructed through a metonymic double movement – or two steps. The first step constructs ‘us’ and reinforces national identity, and the second step pits ‘us’ against ‘them’, thereby mobilizing difference. We elaborate on this. First, metonymy is a linguistic means of reduction (Burke, 1969b; Matus, 1989) that conjoins national and organizational identification, thereby generating a collective ‘us’. We illustrated how metonymy collapses the category of ‘organization’ into that of ‘nation’. This allows the ‘national’ to have interpretive dominance (Stuckey and Antczak, 1994) and casts a national frame in accounts of the international merger or acquisition.

Second, metonymy enables the juxtaposition of ‘us’ against ‘them’. This allows for a portrayal of polarization between respective identities and interests. Such polarization is extended from the organization to the nation. This is particularly relevant in situations where threat is constructed. The notion that a group’s culture can become salient in situations of perceived threat has long been established in the merger literature (Marks and Mirvis, 1985). Simultaneously, the literature on national identity discusses how the nation becomes mobilized through perceptions of an external challenge or threat (Andersen, 1983). We argue that metonymy enables the meeting of the two. It enables the construction of threat to the nation-for-organization. This, in turn, leads to the depiction of national cultural differences during M&As. In other words, national metonymy (at times with other tropes) enables the portrayal of confrontation between nations-for-organizations. The first way in which the portrayal of such confrontation occurs is by invoking a threat to ownership, extended from organization to nation. One example is through metonym as object of action. An organization or its product is the object of actions by nation-for-people (*this bud’s for Belgium/EU, hands off our Bud, not your Bud*). ‘Our/your’ invokes national collective ownership. So, the portrayed struggle is between nations over ownership of the beer (as metonym for the organization). The second way in which metonymy enables the depiction of international confrontation is by posing the metonym as the agent whose actions instigate national cultural differences (the adversary). Organizations and/or their membership become defined by their nation/nationality (*China takes a bite, Belgian brewer attacks*). This polarizes ‘us/them’ and depicts national cultural differences.

There is further theoretical insight to be gleaned from the interaction of metonymy and agency. When media texts combine metonymy’s reductive effect with its substitutive effect, or agency-shifting, there is potential for tension between ambiguity and responsibility. Whereas the deployment of metonymy enables ambiguity (Deignan, 2005), the latter is a double-edge sword. On the one hand, when deployed strategically, ambiguity enables multiple interpretations (across constituencies and contingencies) which can be needed for productive agreement
(Eisenberg and Witten, 1987; Giroux, 2006). On the other, ambiguity is problematic in M&As (Jemison and Sitkin, 1986; Maguire and Phillips, 2008; Vaara, 2003). Furthermore, when the deployment of metonymy in media texts shifts agency from the actor to an entity, it potentially camouflages responsibility and accountability. Metonymy can reduce the causation of a complex series of decisions made by someone in their formal role into a simple statement attributed to an entity. In such situations metonymy both reduces the responsibility of the person and transforms her/him to non-agent through substitution with that entity (Moran, 2005). This unfolds in two ways. In the first mode, a nation and/or organization stands for an individual and their actions (e.g. China/Belgium buys organization x) wherein specific organizational actors and their respective decisions are potentially masked. In other words, metonymic ambiguity potentially hides who in a country, capital or organization is responsible for the events and consequences in discussion.

The second mode involves agency-shifting to products. For example, in the expression beer doesn’t cross borders very well the beer becomes the agent and so deflects the responsibility for decisions on product internationalization from managers. The implication of this attribution is relevant since media texts can attribute managers’ activities to the organization or nation. This becomes relevant when an operation is approached with distaste and rendered evocatively, as in: Iconic American brewer Anheuser-Busch reportedly reached a deal last night to sell itself to European giant InBev. This subtly, but powerfully, shifts the controversial action from managers to the organization: sell itself is akin to opting for slavery under a foreign power.

Last, but not least, is the theoretical insight to be gleaned from the combination of irony with metonymy. Since it attempts to encompass the whole rather than a part of the subject in question, Burke (1969b: 512) has described irony as the “perspective of perspectives”. This renders irony a valuable resource in situations of social controversy (Moore, 2003). Earlier we discussed metonymy’s implication in reproducing without questioning. However, the reflexivity involved in ironic construction unmasks and challenges the simplified metonymic figure. Since metonymic reproduction tends to involve ambiguous and even contradictory meanings (Oswick et al., 2004; Cornelissen, 2008; Musson and Tietze, 2004), its combination with irony brings such contradiction into sharp relief. However, the use of irony requires reflexivity about the subtle dynamics of national metonymy, identification and difference. In other words, the language used holds an awareness of metonymy’s reductive effects and attempts to subvert them. Thus, where writers deploy irony as strategy, they potentially overturn the ‘reality’ of national confrontation or threat in M&As. Irony can even be subversive of the central function of metonymy – for example parodying entity-for-those-involved. We leave the last word here to

CONCLUSION

Our key argument has been that metonymy is a central, but poorly understood linguistic resource that is frequently used to (re)produce national cultural differences in representations of international M&As. We have illustrated how such dynamics unfold through extensive iteration of mundane nation metonyms as well as a variety of salient metonymic national identifiers. National metonymy functions to construct emotive frames, stereotypes, ideological difference and threat. In turn, metonymy’s combinations with metaphor can serve to polarize differences (e.g. through war), while its combinations with wit and irony enable play on meanings and resistance to cultural stereotypes. Altogether, the findings extend a path towards future analysis of micro-level processes of identity construction within international management.

The paper contributes to three literatures. First, the analysis contributes to research on international M&As by focusing attention on the central role of metonymy. In particular, it complements previous studies on metaphors in such contexts (Hirsch and Andrews, 1983; Schneider and Dunbar, 1992; Vaara et al., 2003; Koller, 2005; Cummings and Riad, 2007). While prior studies have provided relevant insight into the linguistic and symbolic processes at play in M&As, they have – just like much of the organizational literature on tropes – focused solely on metaphor. While we underline the importance of national metonymy, we further argue that it is often the combination of national metonymy and metaphor that produces the most powerful M&A imagery, such as war or predatory eating. By drawing on the media as a central site from which meaning-making processes are gleaned, our work also contributes to the nascent literature on the media’s role in acquisition processes (Fitzgibbon and Seeger, 2002; Fürsich, 2002; Koller, 2005; Tienari et al., 2003). The point is that the media not only represents, but also effectively (re)produces, national frames on organizational events – and this is accomplished through linguistic resources such as metonymy. Beyond media texts, future research can utilise the metonymic forms and functions posed in this paper towards analysing talk in, and about, organizations using a variety of methods.

Second, the concepts posed in this paper provide a new perspective on the ways in which representations of national identity and national cultural differences are generated in international management. This is important as the literature has been preoccupied with grounding cultural differences in essentialist perspectives (Hofstede, 1980), while the role of language in shaping national identification has been left with little attention. Our work addresses
this gap by specifying how linguistic resources such as metonyms operate to reinforce national identification and cultural differences. It thus opens up one – but certainly not the only – language-based method to analyse national identification in international management. Furthermore, insight into the central role of metonymy advances the critical analysis of key concepts on which international management as a body of knowledge is based (e.g. Ailon, 2008). Specifically, metaphors define a range of inter-cultural experiences – however, the metonymic construction of such metaphors is unexplored. For example, Shenkar et al. (2008) critique the entrenched metaphor of ‘cultural distance’ and pose the alternative metaphor of ‘cultural friction’ as a substitute that better represents inter-cultural engagement. They argue that ‘friction’ shifts the emphasis to the contact between entities or bodies rather than the distance between them. Here, it is relevant to note that any such entity or body – national and organizational – stands for those involved. In other words, metonymy is the first step on which the entity-level metaphors used in international management are based. Such insight opens the space for future research into foundational concepts within international management.

Third, the ideas introduced in this paper contribute to research on tropes in management and organization more generally. They illustrate national metonymy’s fundamental role in language about organization. Furthermore, the analysis supports the view that metonymy can be the grounding trope upon which others are based (Cornelissen, 2008; Musson and Tietze, 2004). Simultaneously, the study demonstrates that it is fruitful to take the step beyond the examination of each trope on its own and to focus on their interaction. This is especially salient in the case of metaphor-metonymy combinations, an area ripe for future theoretical development on tropes (see also Cornelissen, 2008). Furthermore, by unmasking the hidden functions of metonymy, our work enables critical introspection into how certain ideas are both reproduced and resisted.

On the one hand, the analysis highlights the mutually reinforcing effects whereby metonymy (in combination with other tropes) locates national constructs in organizational representations. On the other hand, like Oswick et al. (2004), we underscore that tropes serve both ‘resonance’ and ‘dissonance’ in organizational meaning. Nevertheless, we assert that these functions are not mutually exclusive. In particular, the resonance in metonymy and metaphor can be deployed ironically to generate dissonance. Such dissonance, in turn, enables resistance to the polarizing implications of national identification. This insight into the interactional dynamics between figures of speech is also relevant to management research more broadly since it paves the way for new theorising on tropes and their role in organization.
References


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i Cornelissen (2008), drawing on Putnam (2004), approaches metonymy as whole-for-part as opposed to synecdoche wherein the part stands for the whole. Whereas some authors separate synecdoche from metonymy (Oswick et al. 2004), it can be difficult to distinguish between patterns of the two (Preminger and Brogan, 1993; Hamilton, 2003). This is why, following Jakobson (1956, 1971), we work with metonymy’s broader connotation that includes synecdoche.

ii References to media texts and their writers also frequently deploy metonymy. For example, newspapers and publications often stand for their editors or journalists (as in *The Economist* is of the opinion).

iii This example also deploys institution-for-those-involved metonymy when stating that Congress assumes and can check.

iv These examples are also replete with other metonyms that substitute as agents for groups of people. These include product-for-people-involved (*the beer that bills itself as ‘the great American lager’*) and nation-for-people-involved (*America is not ready, America has anger*).

v This example also deploys versions of entity-for-those-involved (*the administration* for its members, *China* and *North Korea* for their leaders and populations, *Beijing* for the Chinese government).

vi A quick check of the English media sources identified 154 occurrences of the term icon/ic in reference to the brands held by the acquired firms, 126 in relation to A-B and 28 in relation to IBM.

vii Since we focused on metonymies of national-organizational relevance, we excluded many instances of the metonym *red ink* (for financial loss) and its derivatives, such as *in the red*. We also excluded some instances of *blue* as in *blue collar blues*.

viii Metonymy’s reductive function can also be noted here: *don’t sell a slice of the American Dream* reduces limitless dreams and aspirations into a singular and physical Dream, a corpus to be sliced.