
THE RHETORICAL IMPRINT FROM A CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The rhetorical imprint, ideal for probing the rhetoric of a single rhetor, is defined as a unified set of characteristics that function at the manifest and latent levels of rhetoric. From a constructivist viewpoint, this concept is indicative of individual conceptual processes and structures. The constructivist lens is derived from George Kelly's construct theory and his conception of a personal construal system governing human cognition and communication. Constructs develop from primitive constructs derived from human biology, while construct development is bound to embodied experience where the body mediates individual experience and provides content to the primitive constructs. The personal construal system resides in the cognitive unconscious and has a deep-seated and complex metaphorical structure, which is reproduced in the rhetorical imprint. A rhetorical imprint is dynamic and will evolve in concert with the personal construal system to make sense of the world, while remaining internally coherent. In a constructivist understanding of communication, sophisticated personal construal systems produce sophisticated communication, a crucial element of the rhetorical imprint. The rhetorical imprint corresponds to the classical canon of inventio where habitual topoi, metaphorical mental common-places from where available means of persuasion are sought, leave an indelible impression of a rhetor's individuality in rhetoric.

Keywords: rhetoric, rhetorical imprint, Carl Burghardt, constructivism, George Kelly, personal construal system

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INTRODUCTION: ORIGINS OF THE RHETORICAL IMPRINT

The concept of the rhetorical imprint was first coined and defined by Carl Burgchardt (1985: 441) as a device well-suited for studying the reasoned discourse of single, great rhetors:

Through the careful analysis of a rhetor's lifework, it is sometimes possible to discover the 'rhetorical imprint' – a constant, underlying pattern of distinctive verbal characteristics that supports the content of numerous speeches and articles in different contexts. A rhetorical imprint is archetypal in the sense that it is the basic model for the whole rhetorical production of an individual. It is an indelible stamp that manifests itself, to some degree, in each piece of rhetoric a person creates.

Burgchardt was inspired by Osborn and Ehninger's (1962) collaboration on metaphor in public address and the work of Osborn (1967) on archetypal metaphor in rhetoric. Osborn and Ehninger (1962: 223-226) were concerned with the reasons why certain metaphors appeared to be more powerful than others and described metaphor as a stimulus-response process of the mind, a viewpoint different from the conventional semantic definition of metaphor. Here, the process of metaphor begins with the communicative stimulus, i.e. to denote an object or idea by using a sign not ordinarily associated with that object or idea. The stimulus then serves as the catalyst for a complex response cycle which, in everyday idiom, is known as interpretation.

Osborn (1967: 115-116) found archetypal metaphors to have transcendent qualities cutting across generation and culture. He posited that by concentrating on the speeches of one individual or one genre, it would be possible to follow the development of particular metaphors across time or culture. Archetypal metaphors are prevalent in rhetoric and strongly associated with fundamental human experience and motivation.

The ability of archetypal metaphors to transcend cultural boundaries was confirmed by Jamieson (1980: 51), who was interested in the significance of metaphors persisting in the rhetoric of individual rhetors. By investigating the "metaphoric lexicon" of an individual rhetor as reflected in the manifest language, deeper rhetorical consistencies characteristic of the rhetor could be accessed, building on Burgchardt's concept of the rhetorical imprint. For Jamieson (1980: 52), the use of metaphor in rhetoric is especially revealing with regard to the rhetor-audience interaction as intrinsically coherent metaphoric clusters are considered to be particularly powerful and persuasive.

In spite of the initial promise shown in the use of the rhetorical imprint to explore the rhetoric of a single rhetor, the concept did not gain widespread traction in communication circles. However, the idea of a fundamental, underlying template on which the rhetoric of a single rhetor is based can still be a powerful analytical concept used towards understanding the lifework of a single individual as well as the interplay of rhetoric and cognition. Since a rhetorical imprint is so closely associated with individual cognition, a constructivist understanding of communication is implied, which required constructivism as the encompassing theoretical lens through which to further refine the concept of the rhetorical imprint. The fact that the rhetorical imprint was derived from the idea of metaphor as mental process also required a consideration of Lakoff and Johnson's work on metaphor and cognition, as well as Dewey's understanding of the embodied mind and experience.

AIM OF STUDY AND METHOD

The rhetorical imprint is considered in this article through a constructivist lens as a product of individual cognition including biological, cultural and perceptual experience. Therefore, the dynamics of cognition and rhetoric are re-examined from a cognitive perspective. A specific rhetor's upbringing, education, cultural influences and career are all expected to play a role in the evolution of a rhetorical imprint.

With regard to method, a conceptual analysis and application of constructivism to the notion of the rhetorical imprint are provided. The constructivist lens applied in this article is fundamentally derived from a constructivist understanding of communication based on the personal construct theory of George Kelly, the origins of constructs, and the structure of the cognitive unconscious, while the nature in which reality is experienced is elaborated by the embodied realism of Lakoff and Johnson and John Dewey's pragmatism.

THE PERSONAL CONSTRUCT THEORY OF GEORGE KELLY

The notion of the personal construal system is derived from the personal construct theory of George Kelly (1969a: 11), a psychologist who posited the cognitive theory of the person based on a constructivist understanding of the mind (Epting & Paris 2006: 22). Kelly's theory is based on a fundamental postulate, namely that a person's processes are psychologically channelled based on the anticipation and control of events and the drive to understand his or her "phenomenological world" and function therein (Katz 1984: 315; Meyer, Moore & Viljoen 1997: 525). Here, the person is viewed in totality and the mind is not separated from an independent body as is the case with the Cartesian dualistic notion of the person (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 5).

Kelly's personal construct theory is based on three philosophical premises, namely constructive alternativism, pragmatism and phenomenology (Kelly 1955: 3, 17; Meyer *et al.* 1997: 527). Constructive alternativism accepts fluid, alternative or plural constructions of reality (Kelly 1955: 14-17; 1969b: 96; Epting & Paris 2006: 30). Kelly (1955: 17; Meyer *et al.* 1997: 528) drew on the logic of pragmatism to explain the basis on which certain constructs are chosen or discarded. Constructs are not judged based on the correspondence theory to reality, but rather on John Dewey's pragmatism where they are evaluated based on their value. Value is determined by how useful they are, in other words, whether constructs anticipate future events usefully (Kelly 1955: 44, 129). Should an individual's construal system and scheme of constructs be unproductive, the individual would adapt or replace it. Kelly therefore conceived of a constructivism that is inherently pragmatic.

Phenomenology further informed Kelly's third philosophical premise. Although Kelly (1955: 6) acknowledged the existence of an objective reality, he thought it impossible for humans to know the objective reality directly. Humans can gain access to reality only through their subjective knowledge and experience, in other words, their constructions of reality (Kelly 1955: 8, 40). It is through the scheme of constructs that a person tries to make sense of experience, since interpretation is expressed as the interplay of constructs and experience (Brockriede 1985: 155, 157). A person's scheme of constructs will allow the knowing of certain aspects of reality, instead of others (Kelly 1955: 11, 43; Meyer *et al.* 1997: 528-529).

The personal construal system consists of a large number of interacting personal constructs of diverse formal and functional characteristics. The constructs and their characteristics account for individual behaviour, differences and common ground between people, as well as interpersonal interaction (Kelly 1955: 55-56, 90-91; Meyer *et al.* 1997: 538). Constructs are defined as dichotomous conceptual representations of facets of reality. A construct is therefore signified as a set of bipolar conceptions, such as good-bad (Kelly 1955: 59-61, 106).

Events are anticipated or predicted by placing experience in a "perceptual frame" (Delia 1974: 119) representing either one of the two opposing positions. Due to the dual nature of constructs, a construct can only be understood if both poles are known. Individual constructs can be unique as different individuals can understand the same concept differently. It is critical to note that the polar opposites constituting one of the constructs of a single person may not denote the same construct in another person (Epting & Paris 2006: 26).

The phenomena that become the objects of focus for constructs are called elements (Kelly 1955: 57; Katz 1984: 315). The personal construal system drives the process of construction where an unknown element, whether a person, object

or event, becomes associated with constructs that build towards an understanding of the particular element. When a construct is brought to bear on an element, the element is associated with one of the poles of the construct. The associative pole is the semblance pole, while the opposing pole is contrastive. Elements therefore become understood through a dualistic process of association, by aligning the element with a construct where one pole and element resemble one another with the opposing pole providing distinction (Katz 1984: 315).

Constructs can also differ with regard to scope and context. The scope or context of a construct refers to the total range of applicable elements. Certain constructs are more comprehensive than others and can be applied to a wide variety of elements, while others are incidental and have a limited range of applications. A construct, such as good-bad, is comprehensive because of its broad scope of application as it could be applied to almost any number of elements, while a construct, such as endangered-thriving, would have a narrow application to elements, such as fauna or flora. A person has a limited number of constructs, irrespective of the nature of the constructs, while each construct is also limited in its application to different areas of phenomena. As such, a person will never be able to successfully anticipate all events in life and will be caught off-guard by events that are not covered by the scope of applicability of the personal construal system (Kelly 1955: 11-12, 108-109).

Constructs have ordinal relationships with other constructs, rendering the personal construal system hierarchical (Kelly 1955: 9, 57; Katz 1984: 315; Infante, Rancer & Womack 1993: 83; Meyer *et al.* 1997: 538). The scheme of constructs of a personal construal system consists of main and subordinate constructs, where a main or a higher-order construct is comprehensive and encompasses other constructs as fundamentals, which are called subordinate constructs. Should a main construct be drawn on in a particular situation, the subordinate constructs would also be involved (Kelly 1955: 155-157).

Kelly (1955: 56-57, 72) understood the individual to be a motivated being, constantly striving towards the goal of organising reality and improving the personal construal system. As a person's construal system continually evolves and becomes more sophisticated, the person would acquire more articulate verbal constructs. An individual with a more sophisticated personal construal system, such as an adult, would therefore have more pliable and comprehensive constructs than those with less sophisticated personal construal systems, such as children.

The recognition that people are motivated beings is an important connection to a constructivist understanding of rhetoric. Rhetoric, especially instances of public speechmaking, is the product of the rhetor's intent and motivation to persuade an audience or audiences to internalise certain information or adopt a particular

position. Epting and Paris (2006: 22) view Kelly's (1955: 12) constructive understanding of the person to be future-oriented and intent on anticipating future events by continuously developing a dynamic scheme of constructs (Nicotera 1995: 48-49; Meyer *et al.* 1997: 526-527).

THE ORIGIN OF CONSTRUCTS

In Kelly's construct theory, the individual is the source of his or her unique personal construal system and scheme of constructs. Katz (1984: 315-317) identified what he called the "Origin Problem" in Kelly's personal construct theory and based it on a perceived inconsistency of internal logic regarding the origin of the constructs. While the process of elaboration explains the evolution of the construal system, Kelly did not adequately account for the initial source of constructs after birth. Although Kelly did not specifically discuss the origin of constructs, his notion of pre-verbal constructs as precursors for more sophisticated constructs suggested an answer (Katz 1984: 317-318).

Katz (1984: 318) further developed the idea of pre-verbal constructs and proposed that while individuals are not born with a functioning personal construal system with fully-fledged constructs, they are born with primitive constructs derived from humankind's biological legacy. The notion of the primitive construct represents an unconscious impetus towards the development of constructs. Humankind's biological legacy is understood to be a universal condition of human physical embodiment on earth subject to the same governing natural laws (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 317).

All human beings are born into the same natural world with similar bodies and similar basic human experiences, the result of evolution and natural selection. Shared human biology therefore endows human beings with a preliminary set of impersonal constructs at birth, the "primitive constructs", signifying a "common psychic substrate" in all human beings (Hirschman 2002: 315; Katz 1984: 318). Primitive constructs provide a "pattern of perception" for the individual based on perceptual similitude and differentiation and, while it is a means of making sense of the world, it also essentially configures experience (Katz 1984: 320).

Gradually, physical experiences in the world become more coordinated and sophisticated as a person develops from childhood to adulthood, giving rise to the development of constructs of mounting complexity. The nature of experience therefore drives the evolution of primitive constructs into more sophisticated constructs (Hirschman 2002: 316, 319).

Although primitive constructs represent general human biological heritage and embodied experience, they are not rigid, universal mental categories, but allow individual and temporal variations and are essentially experientially mutable

(Katz 1984: 318-319). The development or elaboration (Kelly preferred the latter term) of human cognition as collective representation of personal construal systems is a function of human evolution (Hirschman 2002: 316). Once human cognition achieved metaphorical thought along the evolutionary continuum, primitive constructs became accessible to individuals and the foundations for the development of articulate personal constructs and discerning personal construal systems were laid (Hirschman 2002: 317).

THE STRUCTURE OF THE COGNITIVE UNCONSCIOUS

The personal construal system and its antecedent primitive constructs are derived from the cognitive unconscious. The majority of cognitive processes belong to the domain of the unconscious, which means that people are largely unaware of their cognitive processes and structures that cannot be directly accessed and explored (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 32). Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3) found the personal construal system with concepts that govern every aspect of a person's daily life to have a deep-seated and complex metaphorical character. This means that the concepts and constructs in the personal construal system are metaphorical in nature and that metaphorical concepts structure everyday thought and action.

The elaboration of the personal constructs into a coherent personal construal system is also considered to be metaphorical. The embodied experiences that feed the personal construal system thus become metaphorically structured in the mind. In this way, a rhetor's personal construal system is understood to be metaphorically configured. Lakoff and Johnson's metaphorical concepts (1980: 3-6) are used to elaborate the notion of the personal constructs where the composite conceptions are still dualistic, but the nature of the association is considered to be metaphorical.

The conventional definition of the personal construct as dichotomous conceptual representations of facets of reality already implies an intrinsic metaphorical structuring when considered in terms of the definition of "metaphorical" in the work of Lakoff and Johnson. Here, "metaphorical" means "one kind of thing is understood and experienced in terms of another" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 5). "Metaphorical" therefore subsumes the traditional understanding of construct as a composite of diametric opposites, but provides space for understanding more sophisticated associations between the composite conceptions of the personal constructs. In the current study, the notion of metaphor referred to is not metaphor as figure of speech, but metaphor as a constituent aspect and mechanism of thought and elaboration process of the personal construal system (Radman 1995: 1-2).

REALITY AND THE NATURE OF EXPERIENCE

The act of considering the nature of human reason allows one to explore how human beings make sense of the world, and in this case, based on a constructivist understanding of the mind. Human reason, however, cannot be fully understood until the nature of reality and experience is explored as it is the human experience of reality that feeds the personal construal system located in the mind.

Constructivist scholars vary in their belief of an autonomous and external reality, but agree that should such a reality indeed exist, the exact form would be unknown, which requires individuals to construct conceptual representations thereof based on experience subject to spatial and temporal contexts (Von Glasersfeld 1984: 29-30; Nicotera 1995: 60-61; Eddy 2007: 12). As reality is mediated through individual experience, understanding the nature of experience is therefore crucial for understanding how human beings make sense of the world.

Kelly accepted constructive alternativism in relation to the nature of reality and was unconcerned with finding the true nature of reality because he did not consider meaning to be intrinsic to events or phenomena, but rather to be created by individuals (Epting & Paris 2006: 23). His main interest revolved around the way in which individuals experienced and conferred meaning to the world (Epting & Paris 2006: 31). Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 185, 192-194) conceived of an experientialist view of reality that fundamentally echoes Kelly's viewpoint in that truth is considered as a function of personal construal systems and that absolute and impartial truth is impossible.

Constructivism consequently suggests a universe that is pluralistic, where knowledge of the world is constructed through the personal construal system (Delia 1977: 69; 1974: 119), which has, as previously discussed, its genesis in human biology and the resultant primitive constructs. The constantly evolving world leads to continuously changing human experiences where the meanings derived from experiences are productive and the most useful conception of the world available at that point in time is constituted. Meaning is therefore a product of personal construal systems based in individual experience (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 226-227).

Dewey, concomitant with the constructivism of Kelly and Delia, accepted the possibility that human beings share an external world that is "trans-momentary", "pre-existing", general and individual that could be accessed solely through the process of knowing (Dewey 1916: 250-251, 254; 1989: 38; Maxcy 2003: 58-59). As a result, Dewey's pragmatism is a theory of naturalistic and pluralistic realism where "meaning is embodied in existence" (Dewey 1922: 356, 359) and "different realms of experience" are acknowledged (Dewey 1905a: 394). The Deweyian notion of existence is derived from Darwin's evolutionary theory, as

the cognitive is considered to be “realistically conditioned from the genetic side” (Dewey 1905b: 326). Consciousness can therefore not be separated from the body, but is embodied therein.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 74, 90) also accept a worldview of multiple-constructed conceptions of a mind-independent reality and the belief that human beings are able to possess stable knowledge thereof. According to the philosophy of embodied realism (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 74-93), individual experience is mediated through “organs of experience”, for instance, the body, the central nervous system, hands, eyes, muscles and senses, and can be expressed as embodied experience (Dewey 1940: 247).

Dewey’s notion of a realism based in evolution is further refined and expanded in the embodied realism of Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 95). Reality, for Dewey, as for the constructivists, is a function of embodied experience. Human experience of reality is evidently not a uniform structure and through societal interaction human beings become aware of multiple individual realities (Dewey 1907: 341). Human beings, nevertheless, find harmony in their subjective experiences by establishing common ground among the various individual realities through agreement or a drive towards harmonisation or consistency, although consistency does not presuppose equivalence (Dewey 1907: 327-328; Maxcy 2003: 59).

Individual embodied experiences are purposeful products of cognition and are measured according to how well they serve the intended purpose and are, in other words, pragmatic. Therefore, not only is the birth of the personal construal system derived from the very nature of human embodiment, but also from human experience. Kelly emphasised that, in order to know a person, it is imperative that the idiosyncratic construction of the world as derived from human embodiment be understood (Epting & Paris 2006: 24-25). Thus, in order to know any specific rhetor, the unique construction of the world as reflected in his or her public speeches must be explored.

While reality is subject to individual embodied experience of the life-world, it is also subject to social construction and context. Reality is neither objective nor external, but situated in the process of socialisation where the individual assimilates the communal reality, as well as individual experience and interpretation. As a result, all knowledge of the world is constructed and mediated through comprehension and explanation. The process of interpreting experience is situated in a particular context, which directs the interpretive process (Nicotera 1995: 46, 60-61).

In constructivism, knowledge is based on symbolic interaction with the self, others and the environment (Waddell 1988: 104). In the constructivist interaction with reality, individuals have different personal construal systems and schemes of

constructs and therefore construct different representations of reality. This affects notions of factuality because something that may be true in one conceptual world may not be true in another (Waddell 1988: 107).

Waddell (1988: 107) cautions against a constructivism that moves too close to solipsism, which posits that all experience and perception resides in the mind (Watzlawick 1984: 15). Where constructivists construct interpretations of phenomena and events gleaned from reality, solipsists argue that it is actually reality that is being constructed. In constructivism, meaning is not an intrinsic value of an event or phenomenon, but resident in the human psyche (Waddell 1988: 108). Reality is subject to constructed experience and will never be known completely and absolutely, but will continuously shift and evolve to incorporate new experiences and understandings thereof. In this sense, human knowledge of reality will progress incrementally and will never be final (Delia 1977: 79).

LINKING THE PERSONAL CONSTRUAL SYSTEM AND COMMUNICATION

Delia and colleagues applied a constructivist vision of human reason inspired by Kelly's personal construct theory to human communication. The personal construal system is a tool through which individual communication behaviour is channelled (Nicotera 1995: 55). Interpersonal impressions therefore depend on the personal construal systems introduced to the interpersonal context (Delia 1974: 119). The personal construal system plays an important role in the perception of other people, as well as in message production because it is the foundation informing choices regarding communication.

Impressions of others are based on experience, which encompass observation, as well as self-admissions from the other person. The two sets of impressions can be compared to either validate or invalidate one another altering the construction the perceiver constituted of the other (Delia 1974: 120). Impressions are constructions, which means that observations do not directly represent the intrinsic characteristics of the other's motivation, intentions and mindset, but that the observations and experiences of another are constructed within the perceiver's cognitive structures in the personal construal system on which the perceiver draws in an interpersonal experiential context (Delia 1977: 71).

The process of construction does not involve the discovery of a so-called "true self" (Epting & Paris 2006: 24), but rather involves the construction of the self within the context of continuous interrelations with others. A person's self is therefore invented through physical experience and the process of interaction with others, the latter being a process of mutual construction. Thus, while individual rhetors'

personal construal systems are derived from their singular physical experiences, they are also functions of their social interactions with others throughout their lives.

Personal construal systems change and evolve with more life experiences and social interactions, providing the individual with an increasingly complex personal construal system consisting of a large number of hierarchically integrated constructs. It is not only the range of social experiences that develops the personal construal system, but also the quality of the social interactions (Delia 1974: 120). The evolution of the personal construal system therefore forms the foundation for communicative development, since cognitive development is essential to communicative development.

According to the constructivist notion of development, actions impact and are impacted upon by continuous and contextual constructions. Interpretation and understanding is therefore a composite function of the personal construal system, and communication is a form of action that requires assuming command over communication at various levels, including non-verbal, linguistic, socio-cultural and strategic. The greater the control achieved over communication, the more evolved the personal construal system becomes. Sophisticated personal construal systems are discriminating, structurally coherent, conceptual and produce interpersonal impressions that are wide-ranging, stimulating and integrated (Delia 1974: 119).

A person's construal system will develop in concert with the person throughout his or her life, according to the orthogenetic principle. The orthogenetic principle posits that a person's construal system will evolve from a simple and global scheme lacking differentiation towards a more hierarchically intricate and detailed make-up. The more sophisticated the interpretive scheme, the more discriminating the individual. Interpretive schemes can also vary internally with regard to complexity where certain constructs are more sophisticated, while others are more simplistic (Delia 1974: 120).

The sophistication of the interpretive scheme is a measure of cognitive complexity where complexity is the function of the number of constructs present in an individual's construal system on which that person can draw in order to differentiate. The number of constructs available to a person is indicative of cognitive differentiation (Littlejohn 1999: 113). Should a person be able to draw fine distinctions between similar events or phenomena, that person is said to be cognitively complex. Cognitive simplicity leads to stereotyping and egocentric communication, while cognitive differentiation allows a person to make fine distinctions and therefore circumvent stereotyping (Delia 1974: 120).

Cognitively complex individuals are able to comprehend another's point of view and produce messages sensitive to that differing point of view. This ability is called

perspective taking and produces more sophisticated argumentation attuned to the needs of others involved in the communicative process. Littlejohn (1999: 114) calls this person-centred communication. Individuals who function at higher levels of cognitive complexity are able to incorporate empathy and insight into communication in order to elicit sympathy. Although Kelly never offered a clear theory of personality development (Epting & Paris 2006: 25; Meyer *et al.* 1997: 547), he did understand development to occur based on the individual's ability to observe and conceptualise differences among events. Cognitive complexity and cognitive differentiation are considered to form an integral part of the rhetorical imprint of a specific rhetor.

Constructivism as frame for understanding rhetoric accentuates the creation of meaning as a process equally subject to embodied experience, socially constructed codes and individual conceptual and behavioural structures (Delia 1977: 70). Delia (1970: 140) was interested in the psychological processes underlying persuasive discourse. He felt that conventional communication studies fell victim to the logical fallacy, namely that discourse is derived from pre-existing categories, while he believed that logic, along with reality, truth and meaning, do not exist autonomously from the individual (Delia 1970: 141). Persuasive elements, such as the enthymeme, where the main premise in an argument is implied and not explicitly stated (Larson 1998: 9), are persuasive according to Delia (1970: 147) because it draws on transcendental psychological and physical processes.

Message production involving the interpretation of incoming messages and stimuli and constructing messages through the cognitive system is understood to occur at different hierarchical levels in the mind: manifest and latent. In line with the notion of communication as process, communication is deemed social and interactive, as well as individual. While message production is subject to the individual's cognitive system, it is not an isolated and disjunctive occurrence, but forms part of the encompassing process of human communication. The message is therefore conceptually produced and publicly shared through speechmaking, but it is elicited by messages and stimuli received by the rhetor, interpreted and incorporated into the individual cognitive structure which, in turn, is the foundation of individual message production.

TOWARDS A CONSTRUCTIVIST CLARIFICATION OF THE RHETORICAL IMPRINT

The ontology of human communication as presented in this article echoes a philosophical constructivism robustly fortified by classical or American pragmatism and embodied realism. Delia and colleagues based their idea of perceptual categories of the mind on the personal constructs of Kelly and applied them to human communication. The personal construal system of Kelly, as adopted

by Delia, is elaborated upon in this research by drawing on the pragmatism of Dewey that describes the intrinsic nature of the personal construal system and the embodied realism of Lakoff and Johnson (1999; 1980) to explain the nature of experience.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 16-44) conceived of an embodied mind and contended that the conceptual system which drives thought processes and action in the individual has a fundamental metaphorical character. The embodied realism of Lakoff and Johnson and their notion of metaphorical concepts within personal construal systems are considered to be remarkably constructivist and pragmatic. Their theory emphasises the importance of physical experience in understanding. Reason is not autonomous, but embodied (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 16). The objectivist notion of “truth” is subjugated to understanding as dictated by personal construal systems where meaning is a function of “constructive coherence” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 226-227).

The mutual enrichment of constructivism and pragmatism (in this study pragmatism denotes classical or American pragmatism and its heir, neo-pragmatism) is a natural outcome of the myriad points of convergence between the theories of constructivism and pragmatism (Neubert 2001: 1), especially as regards the pragmatism of Dewey (Baert 2005: 126; Neubert 2001: 3-4). Dewey also conceived of an embodied mind and his work is considered by Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 97) to be a philosophical antecedent of embodied realism.

Ontology foregrounds the role of the individual in message production, but not to the point of psychologism or solipsism, where the individual is the sole source of meaning (Russill 2003: 4). The individual human mind of a particular rhetor as a source of meaning may be the focal point; however, in full recognition of the dialogical process of meaning construction between the individual and society. On the one hand, human behaviour and interaction are understood in terms of universal features transcending specific cases while, on the other hand, human behaviour and interaction are considered to be meaningful only in context, rendering any attempt at generalising immaterial. These opposing positions are reconciled in the notion that human thought and action are influenced by both commonalities transcending individual cases and contextual aspects.

The available literature offers multiple terms used to describe the interpretive structures of the mind as envisioned in a constructivist frame; for instance, the personal construal system, scheme of constructs, conceptual representations or categories of the mind as derived from the personal construct theory of Kelly (1955); the conceptual system of Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3); the perceptual frame (Delia 1974: 119); and the interpretive scheme (Littlejohn 1999: 113), to list the more salient terms. All these terms, however, refer to the same notion, namely

that the human mind is structured according to individual conceptual categories which both govern knowledge and facilitate understanding through embodied experience (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 4).

In order to contemplate ontology as the nature of being, it was necessary to consider two interrelated aspects, i.e. the nature of human reason and the nature of reality, which also includes the nature of experience. The nature of human reason required concerted thought regarding the concept of person and the nature of mind and thought. As the current study followed a constructivist understanding of the mind and human communication derived at its most basic level from the personal construct theory of Kelly, reason is viewed as a function of the personal construal system, which is found to be intrinsically pragmatic, embodied and derived from the cognitive unconscious.

Drawing on Kelly's personal construct theory, it is worth noting that archetypal metaphors correspond to the notion of comprehensive constructs, where constructs with more scope are those constructs that transcend multiple phenomena or events. Archetypal metaphors could be the products of personal constructs with extensive scope which, due to their extraordinary range in the interpretation and understanding of events and phenomena, prove useful across individual cognition. The work of Osborn and Ehniger (1962) situates metaphors within the conceptual categories of the mind as mechanisms of interpretation.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3) elaborated and defined the conceptual approach to metaphor. They conceived of a more complex interplay between metaphor and the mind where the conceptual categories of the mind are not merely sources of metaphor, but rather have an intrinsic metaphorical nature as previously mentioned. In this view, metaphorical concepts in the personal construal system are mechanisms of thought and action (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 7) and therefore facilitate, make sense of and structure experience. Metaphorical concepts in personal construal systems are thus not merely mechanisms with which to know a so-called universal reality external to the individual, but mechanisms to construct multiple individual realities. In the current research, metaphorical concepts are viewed as personal constructs that are conceptually and metaphorically extended beyond the conventional structure of polar opposites.

The use of the term "metaphorical concept" is significant in the current study. Other equivalent terms are "conceptual metaphor" and, simply, "metaphor" depending on the source. In their seminal work, *Metaphors we live by*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 6) used "metaphor" and "metaphorical concept" to refer to the same notion, while other authors such as Kövecses prefer "conceptual metaphor" in referring to the concept defined as the process of comprehending "one conceptual domain in reference to another" (Kövecses 2002: 4). In this scenario, one conceptual domain

would be abstract and unfamiliar (the target domain) and therefore connected to another, more concrete and familiar conceptual domain (the source domain). The “metaphorical concept” is the preferred term in emphasising the conceptual understanding of metaphor as opposed to the traditional view of metaphor as a figure of speech. Metaphor is significant to the current study from a constructivist point of view in that it is understood to structure the personal construal system.

CLOSING ARGUMENT

In constructivist terms, the rhetorical imprint is more than the isolated, recurring use of a particular device of adornment, linguistic or stylistic idiosyncrasy, superficially habitual feature or a compilation of often-used anecdotes. Rather, the rhetorical imprint represents a unified set of rhetorical characteristics that function below the surface of rhetoric, but becomes evident at the surface level of the rhetoric as “a range of consonant verbal manifestations” (Burgchardt 1985: 441).

In the current research, the structure of the rhetorical imprint follows the structure of the personal construal system and scheme of constructs where constructs in ordinal relationships form an integrated interpretive scheme, which is fundamentally metaphorical (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 3). Burgchardt (1985: 442) probed the rhetorical imprint by distinguishing distinctive motifs in the rhetorical lifework of his subject. He defined motif as those distinct rhetorical features that transcend a number of speeches. In a constructivist understanding of the rhetorical imprint, individual themes that are related, constitute motifs. In constructivist terms, the themes and motifs play a particular role in conceptual sense making:

... Kelly’s psychology focuses particular attention on how people give meaning and definition to what is there, such that their own meanings and definitions become the very foundations of who and what they are. That is, each person’s special significance, his or her individuality, is seen in terms of the particular meanings by which each gives both shape and expression to her or his world (Epting & Paris 2006: 23)

The conceptual structure imposed on the rhetorical imprint by the personal construal system is evident at the manifest level, while conceptual content is perceptible at the latent level of rhetoric. In the context of rhetoric, the rhetor is believed to have a unique scheme of constructs governing his or her interpretation, understanding and behaviour. This specialised scheme of constructs is inherently metaphorical and is naturally integrated into the larger personal construal system and scheme of constructs and will therefore become accessible through the rhetorical imprint. A rhetorical imprint is not believed to be static, but elements of the rhetorical imprint, along with the personal construal system of the rhetor

evolve to remain dynamic and effective in making sense of the constructed world, while still remaining internally coherent.

The constructivism based on Kelly's personal construct theory follows the pragmatic principle of utility. Thus, where the nature of human reason, communication and the concept of the rhetorical imprint are contemplated from a constructivist perspective, the approach to studying the rhetorical imprint suggests a pragmatic maxim, in line with the internal organising principle of the specific ontology. Within a constructivist mindset, the belief is that any concept such as the rhetorical imprint is entrenched in a worldview, which provides a foundation of assumptions and concepts (Delia 1977).

In constructivism, the rhetorical imprint is understood as a manifestation of a rhetor's conceptual processes dictating the encoding and sending of messages, corresponding to *inventio*, one of the five traditional canons of classical rhetoric (De Wet 2010: 33; Kennedy 1992: 12; Vickers 1988: 62; Kennedy 1980: 185). *Inventio* or invention refers to the art of discovering subject material and arguments and coheres with the notion of conceptualising argument or message production (Olmsted 2006: 2; Vickers 1988: 63).

Aristotle's concept of *topoi* is an important device in *inventio* or the invention of argument. *Topoi* are metaphorical mental common-places from where the available means of persuasion (*topoi*) may be sought. *Topoi* may be universal and therefore applicable to general arguments regarding any subject matter or relating specifically to particular subjects, which are called *idia*. The majority of enthymemes originate from the specific *topoi* or *idia* (Aristotle 1991: 45 – 47; Kennedy 1991: 320; Aristotle 1932: 15-16). Aristotle's (1991: 47) notion of *topoi* or topic is a kind of a metaphorical concept where loci or "common places" are used as mnemonic mechanisms to store information for subsequent recall.

Nothstine (1988: 155) elaborated on Aristotle's *topoi* to posit that the "place" metaphorical concept suggests that the individual is located at a "place", which affords a particular perspective on the world and the things in it. Individuals understand themselves as beings in specific circumstances, who are placed in a particular horizon with a restricted view. Nothstine's (*ibid.*) understanding of *topoi* accepts perceptual plurality and is inherently constructivist. Topic is therefore an expression of the character of the individual rhetor (Nothstine 1988: 159). By analysing *topoi*, the resources utilised in invention or *inventio* can be discerned, while the *topoi* employed habitually by an individual leave an indelible impression of the rhetor's individuality on rhetoric.

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