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Figuring Embedded Librarianship: An Analysis of the Embedded Journalist Metaphor in the Professional Discourse

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Figuring embedded librarianship: An analysis of the embedded journalist metaphor in the professional discourse

In the wake of the COVID pandemic, many academic libraries sought virtual instruction options, like the embedded librarian model, bringing renewed interest to the topic. Debates defining embedded librarianship are plentiful and varied, but a review of the professional literature reveals a commonly used metaphor comparing embedded librarians to embedded journalists. This paper analyses the prevalence of that metaphor in the professional discourse through the lens of cognitive metaphor theory (CMT) to reveal the semantic and pragmatic implications of its use. CMT highlights the power of figurative language to reflect and define professional identities. The metaphor's militaristic rhetoric counters negative stereotypes of librarians as passive or meek, while the metaphor's combative rhetoric discloses complex power dynamics between academic librarians and faculty. However, the etymology of 'embed' reveals more productive definitions related to geology, computer science, and linguistics. Embracing these multiple definitions will help librarians shape that role in the future.

Introduction

Metaphors characterising libraries, librarians, and library and information science itself are plentiful in the professional discourse, and scholars have analysed the value of metaphors to both reflect and shape professional roles. For librarians, those roles are deeply connected to the library space, and, as libraries have moved from physical buildings to virtual spaces, the language Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals use to talk about librarian roles has also evolved. One role often discussed in the literature is that of the teaching librarian in both in-person and online environments (Walter, 2008; Zai, 2015, Wheeler & McKinney, 2015; Lewitzky, 2020; Baer, 2021). Discussions of the role of teaching librarians in online environments have become a timely topic in the wake of COVID, as many libraries moved their instruction to a fully or partially virtual format (Norton, 2021; Stimpson, 2020; Ibacache et al.,

2021). One form of online library instruction frequently discussed in the literature is embedded librarianship. The literature regarding embedded librarianship is both plentiful and diverse, with little agreement on how to define the concept (Schulte, 2012; Abrizah & Afiqah-Izzati, 2016). Indeed, as Drewes & Hoffman (2010) claim, “literature about embedded librarianship is so diverse that the definition of the term, as well as related goals and methods...can be difficult to define” (p. 75). Most literature about embedded librarianship focuses on case studies (Kearley & Phillips, 2004; Almeida & Pollack, 2017; Murray & Feinberg, 2020) and best practices (York & Vance, 2009; Hoffman & Ramin, 2010, Andrews, 2015), with some works defining and tracing its history (Kesselman & Watstein, 2009; Drewes & Hoffman, 2010; Abrizah & Afiqah-Izzati, 2016). None of those sources, though, provide an in-depth analysis of the language used to explain embedded librarianship, specifically the embedded librarian as embedded journalist metaphor. This metaphor, first introduced by Dewey (2004) persists in contemporary discussions of embedded librarianship (Jackson, 2021) and represents one area of commonality in the literature.

If as some claim, embedded librarianship is the future of librarianship (Kesselman & Watstein, 2009), then analysing the language defining the role is key to understanding how librarians conceive of their professional identities and the future of the profession at large. Examining the professional discourse of librarians, particularly the metaphors characterising embedded librarianship, reveals the complex and ever-changing identities of librarians in physical and virtual library spaces. As Gooding & Terras (2016) claim, metaphors “have the power to constrain and define our thinking” (p. 208), and the embedded journalist metaphor demonstrates that power to shape professional librarian identities. On the one hand, the metaphor’s associations with war and combat shed light on complex power dynamics between librarians and faculty in

academic settings. In an environment in which faculty members often have control over where and how much library instruction takes place, the space occupied by an embedded librarian could be likened to a battleground. The metaphorical comparison also raises questions about who might be considered allies versus enemies in such a space. On the other hand, the militaristic rhetoric helps further the claim that the active nature of embedded librarianship counters stereotypes of passive, meek, or ineffectual librarians (Dewey, 2004). However, the term ‘embed’ etymologically suggests a much more nuanced and positive framework for the embedded librarian in today’s academic library than the journalist metaphor implies. A careful exploration of the etymology reveals definitions related to journalism, as well as geology, computer science, mathematics, and linguistics. Library and information science is, as Budd and Raber (1996) assert, a “multidiscipline embracing aspects of [linguistics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and communication]” (p. 217), and embracing a multidisciplinary definition for embedded librarianship benefits the professional discourse.

This paper will discuss embedded librarianship in relation to the use of metaphor in LIS literature at large, examining metaphors illustrating the changing role of librarians and identifying stereotypes about librarianship. The embedded librarian as embedded journalist figure will be examined through the multidisciplinary lens of cognitive metaphor theory (CMT), with a discussion of the major figures and ideas associated with CMT. As Charteris-Black (2004) claims, metaphors serve both a semantic and pragmatic role, and the analysis will highlight the complex etymology and multiple connotations of the metaphor along with possible reasons behind its persistence in the professional literature. Interrogating the metaphor’s underlying assumptions about librarians has ramifications for the practice of librarianship (Boyd &

Amedegnato, 2019; Baer, 2021). The etymology of ‘embed’ suggests alternative models for embedded librarianship in contrast to the combative nature of the embedded journalist figure. These alternative models could be seen as examples of what Schön (1993) refers to as “generative metaphors,” which, in turn, help librarians frame their future roles.

Metaphors in LIS Literature

Religious and Educational Metaphors

Religious and educational metaphors figure prominently in the early history of librarianship. Nardini (2001) studied the use of metaphors during the first fifty years of the American library movement as published in *Library Journal* and *Public Libraries*. He argued that metaphors in LIS have the power to transform negative perceptions of libraries and librarians both inside and outside of the profession (Nardini, 2001). Nardini (2001) identified a shift from early characterisations of the library as a museum or jail to a school, university, or church to later metaphors, influenced by the rise of industry, likening libraries to workshops and machines. He cited Dewey’s 1876 speech illustrating the shift in the old passive custodial metaphors “when a library was very like a museum, and a librarian was a mouser in musty books” (p. 112) and “the old library was passive, asleep, a reservoir or cistern, getting in but not giving out” (p. 114) to the new active educational metaphors “when a library is a school, and the librarian is in the highest sense a teacher” (p. 113). In addition to linking libraries to education, early writers also employed religious terminology to convey the importance of libraries, describing them as “the parish churches of literature and education” (p. 117) with “the librarian as the missionary of literature” (p. 118). The rhetoric shifted in the early 1900s to incorporate references to business, with librarians writing about how “library service

must be sold just as any other goods are marketed” (p. 123). In particular, Nardini (2001) notes the power of metaphors in LIS literature to garner support from the public, to recruit new librarians, and spark debate on the roles of libraries and librarians.

VanScoy (2016) highlights similar religious and educational language in his discussion of metaphors for reference and information service roles. He notes the spiritually inflected language used in the literature comparing librarians to “a priesthood of searchers [in the] center of the academic temple” (p. 243). Drawing upon the work of both Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Schön (1993), VanScoy argues that language affects behavior and studying metaphors can “change perceptions or behaviors by introducing more positive or productive metaphors” (p. 244). Like VanScoy, Ettarh (2018) also examines the connection between libraries and religious language. In her critical essay, “Vocational awe and librarianship: the lies we tell ourselves,” Ettarh argues that such language leads to and reinforces institutional oppression. She employs a vocation metaphor to interrogate “the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in beliefs that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred, and therefore beyond critique” and that “librarianship is a sacred calling.” She interrogates the etymology and religious connotations of both ‘vocation’ and ‘awe’ relative to the history of librarianship and challenges the use of such religious language in the profession.

Librarians in the Trenches

Like Ettarh, Baer (2021) questions the role of metaphorical language in defining professional librarian identities. Specifically, she characterises the study of metaphors as a key component of critical reflective practice. Baer’s analysis, like VanScoy’s, draws upon the work of both Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Schön (1993). She focuses on the teaching role of librarians by examining the language used in the Association of

College & Research Libraries' roles and strengths of teaching librarians document, the language used by librarians to describe their own instructional roles, and the metaphors used in the field of teacher education. One important parallel Baer (2021) identifies between teaching librarians and teacher education is the use of metaphors related to flexibility and agency, with library instruction often being described as "rigid and involving a lack of agency" (p. 70), as librarians "battle" with faculty to earn "the gift of time" (p. 72) with students. The metaphors reveal "unequal power relations and a sense of lacking agency" (p. 72) in academic libraries, where faculty often hold most of or all the power. In many cases, faculty members determine to what degree the librarian will be involved in the course and when and how interactions between the librarian and the students take place.

The language of battle in relation to librarians is also the subject of Civallero's (2016) exploration of the library as trench metaphor. Civallero (2016) argues that libraries are "places for activism, critical thinking, militancy" (p. 2), and that "as a war metaphor, a trench can be considered a place for survival and resistance" (p. 7) with "librarians as active militants involved in non-partisan politics from within a trench" (p. 8). Unlike Civallero's (2016) endorsement of military metaphors, Boyd and Amedegnato (2019) assert that war metaphors in academic library discourse have "potentially unfavourable, if not damaging consequences" (p. 17), such as encouraging stronger stereotypical inferences and increasing biased attitudes. They examine the prevalence of war metaphors in academic library settings, like reference librarians staffing the "front line" and working "in the trenches." Boyd and Amedegnato (2019) claim that examining this type of language is a key part of reflective practice, and they call for the adoption of different metaphors "that will engender and sustain positive

relationships between those who work in academic libraries and those who use them” (p. 17).

Giesecke (2011) also asks librarians to examine the need for new metaphors in the professional discourse. With the constantly evolving nature of libraries and library work, she argues that librarians and library staff need to transform their mental models through metaphors to persuade others of the continued relevance of librarians. Giesecke (2011) explores librarian metaphors informed by the language of computer science in the late 20th century, with reference to librarians as “information engineers” and “information navigators on the information highway” (p. 57) and tracks the search for new metaphors in the 21st century, such as “hybrid,” “blended,” and “embedded librarians” (p. 58). Many of the new metaphors Giesecke identifies challenge the stereotype of libraries as static and collection-centred by presenting libraries as active and user-centred. One metaphor that serves this purpose is the library as an ecosystem, which promotes biodiversity through partnerships and collaboration.

What these analyses reveal is the importance of metaphors to defining the practice of librarianship. The evolving metaphors also illustrate the constantly changing nature of the profession. Many of those metaphors, like the library as school and the librarian as a teacher, counteract negative stereotypes of librarians as passive, static, and collection centred. The embedded librarian as journalist metaphor fits into this same pattern by presenting itself as an active alternative to the passive figures who wait in the library for patrons to come to them. While some critics focus on what is gained through using metaphors, such as the power to influence how people both inside and outside of the profession think about it, others focus on what could be lost or obscured by the comparison, such as whitewashing institutional inequalities and increasing bias. Cognitive metaphor theory (CMT), originating from the work of George Lakoff and

Mark Johnson, offers a lens to further investigate the possible value and risk of the embedded librarian as journalist metaphor.

Metaphor theory and professional discourse

One of the most frequently cited works on metaphor theory in the LIS literature (as well as outside LIS) is Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) seminal work *Metaphors we live by*. Their work was influential in the development of cognitive metaphor theory, which argues that metaphor is integral to the structure of thought and language (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2018). CMT provides an interdisciplinary way to examine how the language associated with the library profession shapes the roles of librarians. To recognise the importance of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) work, though, it's necessary to briefly discuss the history of metaphor theory.

A Brief History of Metaphor Theory

Many trace the origins of metaphor theory to Aristotle, who "believed that metaphors were implicit comparisons based on the principles of analogy" (Charteris-Black, 2004, p. 25). Thus, this view is referred to as the comparison theory of metaphor, and it defines metaphor as a merely stylistic ornament of language (Charteris-Black, 2004). I.A Richards (1936) challenged that classical view in his work, *The philosophy of rhetoric*, arguing that the study of metaphor should occupy a more prominent place in the field of rhetoric than it previously had. Instead of seeing metaphor as a "an ornament or *added* power of language" (p. 90), Richards (1936) argued that it should be recognised as "the omnipresent principle of language" (p. 92). His theory is sometimes referred to as the interaction view of metaphor since he claims that "when we use metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction" (Richards,

1936, p. 93). Richards created a new language for describing that interaction, by breaking down metaphors into the vehicle and the tenor, with the tenor being “the underlying idea or principal subject which the vehicle or figure means” (97). Using the previous example of Dewey’s library as school metaphor, the library would be the tenor, or principal subject, and the school would be the vehicle, the means of describing that subject.

Cognitive Metaphor Theory

Like Richards, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) reject the classical comparison view of metaphor, but they take the interaction view even further by claiming that language itself is structured by metaphor at a neural level (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2017), hence why it is referred to as cognitive metaphor theory. In *Metaphors we live by*, the authors examine the power of prototypical or conceptual metaphors to reflect and shape patterns of thought in a specific group or society. One conceptual metaphor relevant to the discussion of embedded librarianship is the argument as war figure. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) highlight the warlike terminology often used to discuss arguments, including “attack,” “right on target,” “won,” and “shot down,” (p. 4). They claim that the language forms conceptions of what an argument should be and influences how people argue: “it is in this sense that the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is one that we live by in this culture; it structures the actions we perform in arguing” (p. 4). Pervasive metaphors, like ‘argument is war,’ demonstrate that metaphors affect as well as reflect reality. Lakoff and Johnson’s work also complicated Richards’ (1936) tenor-vehicle framework. Lakoff and Johnson replaced Richards’ tenor and vehicle with the language of target and source domains. As Lakoff (1993) explains in a later essay, using the love as a journey metaphor:

metaphor involves one domain of experience, love, in terms of a very different domain of experience, journeys. More technically, the metaphor can be understood as a mapping (in the mathematical sense) from a source domain (in this case, journeys) to a target domain (in this case, love). The mapping is tightly structured. There are ontological correspondences. (p. 206-207)

So, returning to the library as school metaphor, using Johnson and Lakoff's terminology, the library would be the target, while the school would be the source domain.

Like Lakoff and Johnson, Schön argues that a metaphor is key to how people make sense of reality. In *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*, Schön (1983) examines metaphor's role in professional discourse, particularly in the sciences. He highlights the importance of recognizing similarities (what he calls *seeing-as*) to the advancement of professional scientific knowledge: "when a practitioner makes sense of a situation he perceives to be unique, he *sees as* something already present in his repertoire" (p. 138). To illustrate this *seeing-as* process, Schön (1983) describes a scenario in which product researchers created a new metaphor, a paintbrush as pump, to improve a new paintbrush design; he calls such a metaphor a "generative metaphor" because "it generated new perceptions, explanations, and inventions" (p. 185). In his chapter "Generative metaphor a perspective on problem-setting in social policy," Schön (1993) elaborates on the generative metaphor concept. He examines how social problems are often framed in terms of pervasive metaphors shaped by implicit beliefs; he claims that "the essential difficulties in social policy have more to do with problem setting than with problem solving" (p. 138). Schön argues that negative metaphors are often used to identify social problems, like the metaphors of disease used to describe housing "slums" in the 1950s. Instead he advocates for the use of generative metaphors, like the paintbrush as pump, to reframe debates in a more productive way.

The embedded librarian as embedded journalist figure similarly illustrates an issue of problem setting, which also becomes an issue of problem solving. By framing the interaction between the librarians and patrons in terms of war, the metaphor sets up a combative relationship between librarians and everyone else. Likening the embedded librarian's space to a space of conflict frames an antagonistic relationship between librarians and those they interact with. Once this problem is set, then much of the literature goes about presenting solutions to that problem, particularly by focusing on the importance of collaboration and integration (Dewey, 2004; Kesselman & Watstein, 2009; Drewes & Hoffman, 2010; Delaney & Bates, 2015; Murray & Feinberg, 2020).

Critical Metaphor Analysis

Charteris-Black (2004), like Schön, is interested in social implications of using metaphors. Like Lakoff and Johnson, Charteris-Black argues that metaphors are key in developing conceptual frameworks, but he also claims that metaphors serve a pragmatic as well as semantic role: "this is a pragmatic role because it reflects the linguistic choices that realise particular rhetorical intentions within a particular text" (p. 8). Charteris-Black invokes the multifaceted history of metaphor studies in relation to philosophy, rhetoric, and argumentation. He finds the cognitive approach lacking because it does not consider the rhetorical function of metaphors. Instead, he advocates for a method of critical metaphor analysis, which incorporates methodologies from cognitive, corpus, and critical linguistics. He argues that "the *critical* part of metaphor analysis is identifying the propositions that underlie the cognitive basis of metaphors and reveal the intentions of speakers" (p. 11). Charteris-Black's focus on the pragmatic and well as semantic role of metaphor is relevant to the study of the embedded journalist metaphor because of the persistence of that metaphor in the professional literature. It is important to consider what is gained and what is lost for librarians and

the profession through the continued use of the embedded journalist metaphor from a pragmatic and semantic perspective.

Defining embedded librarianship

Conceptual metaphor theory and critical metaphor analysis provide frameworks to examine the embedded librarian as embedded journalist metaphor. This analysis follows a research strategy for metaphor analysis established by Ignatow (2003) and Ignatow and Williams (2011) in which one begins “with an anomalous or unexpected example of metaphorical language” (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2018)—the embedded librarian as embedded journalist metaphor—and then examines the use of that phrase over time. The author conducted a search of English-language materials using the terms “embedded librarian*” in *Library Literature & Information Science*, *Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts*, and *Web of Science* to identify a broad base of literature on embedded librarianship.¹ The search focused mainly on scholarly journal articles but also included some collections of essays and monographs that were frequently cited in the literature. From there, the sources were scanned for any reference to “embedded journalis*” to identify works that employed that specific comparison. Then, the rhetoric in those works was analysed, looking for similarities and differences in word choice, meaning, and associations.

¹ The review of the literature was complicated by the fact that, as Drewes and Hoffman (2010) claim, embedded librarianship “is a relatively new term but an old concept” (p. 81), meaning that not all the literature related to embedded librarianship uses that exact term. Some trace the origins to 19th century branch libraries (Drewes & Hoffman, 2010) while others connect embedded librarianship to clinical librarianship in the healthcare field (Kesselman & Watstein, 2009; Shumaker 2012). Since this analysis was interested specifically in the journalist metaphor, the author focused only on works using variations of “embedded librarian” or “embedded librarianship.”

Establishing the Journalist Metaphor

One of the earliest works in the literature on embedded librarianship, often credited with coining the phrase (Almeida & Pollack, 2017), is Dewey's 2004 article, "The embedded librarian: strategic campus collaborations." Significantly, Hines (2013) also identifies 2004 as the year the "term 'embedded librarian' became a catchphrase" (p. 5). Dewey (2004) begins her article with an explanation of the embedded journalist metaphor: "the metaphor of 'embedded librarian' is inspired by the recent phenomenon of embedding journalists into various military sections during the Iraq war and its aftermath" (p. 5-6). She explains the connection in more detail, stating "the concept of embedding implies a more comprehensive integration of one group with another group to the extent that the group seeking to integrate is experiencing and observing, as nearly as possible, the daily life of the primary group" (p. 6). According to Dewey, proximity is key to integration in either a physical or a digital space. Dewey's article employs military rhetoric like the "rules of engagement" (p. 6), to describe the need to change perceptions of academic libraries as "custodial, static, and passive in nature" (p. 6). In contrast, she argues that libraries need to transition from "passive to active, reactive to proactive, staid to lively, and singular to social" (p. 6) positions to thrive and that the embedded librarian model is one way to achieve that. She claims that "a proactive approach is essential in getting one or more seats at the right tables rather than waiting to be asked" (p. 10), again drawing a distinction between the antiquated, passive librarian stereotype and the new, active embedded librarian she is advocating for. The use of militaristic rhetoric serves that purpose. Dewey's article helped pave the way for future discussions of embedded librarianship.

The history of the concept of 'embedded journalists' is also significant to Dewey's choice of metaphor. The term 'embedded journalist' was relatively new when Dewey's article was published in 2004. As Dewey indicates, embedded journalism was

closely associated with the Iraq War from 2003 to 2011. After fears that granting American journalists too much access during the Vietnam War led to negative perceptions about the war, the US military restricted journalistic access after Vietnam (Cortell et al., 2009). To combat perceptions that the military was preventing journalists from reporting on war, the US Department of Defense (DOD) created a new program for embedding journalists with troops during Operation Iraqi Freedom (Cortell et al., 2009). In total, more than six hundred journalists were embedded with troops during the war. As Zeide (2005) explains,

these journalists traveled and lived with American forces, observing and sharing the same living and battlefield conditions. In exchange, embeds agreed to follow the military's ground rules...The DOD touted the program as a revolution in military-press relations that would grant journalists unprecedented access. (p. 1313)

As the provocative title of Zeide's essay "In bed with the military: First Amendment implications of embedded journalism" implies, the objectivity of embedded journalists was heavily debated, with some arguing that reporters' intimate relationship with the troops lessened their objectivity and others arguing that the relationship increased objectivity and promoted First Amendment values (Fahmy & Johnson, 2005). This brief background on the origin of embedded journalism reveals a complex relationship between the US military and the press and the strategic use of the program to influence public perceptions of the troops and journalists. This history resonates with Dewey's pragmatic use of the metaphor. She is also interested in changing public perceptions, in this case, of librarians. Her use of the metaphor along with the militaristic language enhances her claim that librarians need to combat stereotypes of passivity to fight for a seat at the table with other institutional stakeholders.

Transforming the Metaphor

Scholars after 2004 followed Dewey's lead, while offering their own interpretations and qualifications of the metaphor. One prolific author in the scholarship on embedded librarianship is David Shumaker, and his use of the journalist metaphor is complicated. In his 2009 column, "Who let the librarians out? Embedded librarianship and the library manager," he, like Dewey, positions embedded librarianship as the new ideal for engagement. He explains:

these librarians broke out of their libraries, built new relationships, and found new ways to deliver new kinds of services to the people in their communities who need them most...these folks have found new ways to create new services and new value for their libraries by getting out into the communities they serve
(p. 240)

Embedded librarians are like embedded journalists because they are where the action is; they "broke out" of their natural library environment to create a "new" role. In his 2012 book, *The embedded librarian*, Shumaker provides a similar definition of embedded librarianship highlighting the close relationship between journalists and their military units and, by extension, between librarians and their patrons: "the term *embedding* suggests a physical process. Embedded journalists live with military units, sharing in their experiences and observing their routines and combat actions in a theater of war" (p. 6). Even though Shumaker seemed to embrace the metaphor in these examples, he also openly challenged the comparison in a 2010 blog post titled "Why embedded librarians are not like embedded reporters." He sees the embedded librarian as a partner not an observer:

the embedded reporter in a combat unit is there only as an observer, not a participant. Nobody expects her/him to pick up a weapon and start shooting! Not so the embedded librarian—we're there to pitch in and contribute to the team's goals and objectives.

Shumaker (2010) distinguishes between the active participation of the embedded librarian in furthering the team's goals and the embedded journalist's passive observation of the military unit, thereby suggesting the inadequacy of the initial metaphor.

In the definition section of their article on embedded librarianship, Drewes and Hoffman (2010), like Shumaker, highlight similarities between the location of embedded journalists and librarians in relation to their units and patrons. They begin their discussion by explaining the embedded journalist metaphor:

An embedded journalist is placed in a military unit to observe and report on conflicts, exercises, and missions from an insider's vantage point... Embedded librarian programs often locate librarians involved in the spaces of their users and colleagues, either physically or through technology, in order to become part of their users' culture. A librarian's physical and metaphorical location is often what defines them as embedded. (p. 76)

For Drewes and Hoffman (2010), as with the previous authors, proximity is a defining feature of embedded librarianship and one of the ways librarians most closely resemble embedded journalists. The authors explain that this close access can take place physically or virtually. They suggest an additional meaning to the term 'embedded' in the context of virtual spaces: "the name *embedded librarian* in this context is a double entendre, as the insertion of widgets and multimedia files into HTML code when designing Web site is usually called the embedding of the file" (p. 79). The reference to embedding in a computer science context is just a passing one, but it is an equally relevant one. Rather than being merely a "double entendre," the reference showcases the multiple meanings of 'embed' and suggests an alternative metaphorical framework. Brower (2011) also begins his history of embedded librarianship with the metaphor.

However, he points out the differences rather than the similarities between reporters and librarians:

When many people hear the term *embedded*, they remember TV journalists embedded with troops in 2003 during the war in Iraq. Fortunately, embedded academic librarians work in an environment far from combat and, instead, are finding ways to embed their skills and services in physical and virtual environments. (p. 3)

Brower makes the distinction that academic librarians do not work in a combat environment but still employs the metaphor.

Perhaps one of the most blatant examples using militaristic rhetoric to illustrate the role of embedded librarians is Ball's 2013 piece titled "What do war and embedded librarianship have in common?" Ball begins her discussion of embedding librarians in a legal practice by pointing out the similarities between journalists and librarians:

"embedded librarians inside a legal practice group have much in common with embedded journalists covering a war. They are metaphorically in the trenches with the soldiers, and both share the goal to create a reliable information environment." Ball addresses the issue of the librarian fitting in to the legal practice environment. She explains:

unfit and ill-prepared journalists were sent to boot camp to get into shape before going to war...librarians...must hit the ground running—they don't have the luxury of boot camp to learn how to play with the big boys and girls...Once embedded in the practice groups, they become an integral part of the groups.

Ball references the need to challenge "management's traditional stereotype of a law librarian" but fails to overtly state what that stereotype is. To argue for the value of embedded librarians, she switches to a biological metaphor of a symbiotic relationship between scavenging fish and sharks: "for comic relief, we can visualise embedded

librarians as the small fish scavenging the vast ocean of information to feed the lawyers, the large predatory sharks (no pun intended).” While Ball’s argument is directed toward law librarians and legal firms, it does reveal some of the major issues that those writing about embedded librarianship acknowledge: stereotypes about librarians interfering with the librarian’s ability to fit in with the population they serve. Ball concludes her argument on a hopeful and militaristic note, claiming that

When law librarians are embedded in practice groups as equal partners...[they] can help win the war on our competition with a game strategy that will arm the members of the firms with the research information services they need to win and retain satisfied clients.

Like Dewey, Ball’s use of military rhetoric frames the work of embedded librarians in terms of war, competition, strategies, and winning. This framing elicits questions about who embedded librarians are at war with and what battle they are trying to win. If, as many scholars writing about embedded librarianship claim, two important goals of embedded librarians are collaboration and integration with their target population, then how does a war metaphor further that goal?

Alternative models

The analysis of the embedded journalist metaphor in the discourse reveals one difficulty with metaphors identified by Lakoff and Johnson; they explain that “in allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept...a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor” (p. 10). This difficulty is demonstrated by the fact that scholars employ the metaphor while simultaneously pointing out its shortcomings, suggesting the need for alternative metaphors.

Etymological Considerations

In *The embedded librarian*, Shumaker (2012) endorses a different model based on the etymology of the word ‘embed.’ He claims that “the most succinct definition of the term embedded librarianship is the one offered by Jezymenne Dene” (p. 4), based on the geological definition of ‘embed.’ In her discussion of drafting an embedded librarian initiative at Claremont College, Dene (2011) explains that her team “chose to define an embedded librarian as ‘an integral part of the whole,’ based on the geological definition of an embedded element” (225). Dene rejects the metaphor of the embedded journalist and its war-related rhetoric in favour of this scientific definition that highlights the importance of integration and cohesion.

One of the earliest examples of this alternative geological definition can be found in Kesselman and Watstein (2009). They explain that “the most common meaning of *embed*...is ‘to fix into a surrounding mass: *to embed stones in cement*’...more germane to our discussion is another meaning—‘to contain or implant as an essential or characteristic part’” (p. 386). They move from a literal to metaphorical definition, suggesting that the physical process of embedding in rocks can be translated to a cognitive process of integration. Kesselman and Watstein’s (2009) definition of ‘embed’ corresponds to those provided by both the Merriam-Webster and the Oxford English Dictionary. Merriam-Webster’s provides four major definitions of the adjective ‘embedded:’ “occurring as a grammatical constituent (such as a verb phrase or clause) within a like constituent; enclosed closely in or as if in a matrix, set firmly into a mass or material; attached to a military unit or group for some purpose (such as covering a conflict or providing expert advice); drawn from and linked to an external source but displayed or accessed locally, functioning as part of a larger device rather than as an independent unit or system.” In addition to that geological definition, Merriam-Webster also includes definitions relating to linguistics, journalism, and computer science. The

Oxford English Dictionary also identifies different categories of definitions for the term: “geological--that is fixed and firmly in a surrounding solid mass (with the earliest usage dating from 1818); linguistics--of a sentence, contained within a larger sentence, subordinate; and mathematical--in sense additions.” The OED also includes the military definition related to journalists: “to attach (a journalist) to a military unit to report on a conflict, dating back to 1995.” Kesselman and Watstein (2009) draw attention the etymology of ‘embed,’ but then trace the term ‘embedded librarian’ to a 2005 blog that references the embedded journalist metaphor. The authors also propose adding two other key factors to discussions of embedded librarianship: “integration and collaboration” (p. 387). Their discussion highlights the complexity of the term ‘embed’ and points to alternative metaphors for embedded librarianship.

Almeida and Pollack (2017) provide a critical assessment of both the concept and the terminology in their article, “In bed with the library: a critical exploration of embedded librarianship at the City University of New York.” The authors’ title, as they acknowledge, invokes the etymology of the term embed itself:

the word embed, etymologically a combination of in and bed, has been used since the 18th century...Like a germ or a lodged pebble embeddedness implies both a process of dispersal and fixity—a kind of dislocation that is not freighted with out-of-placeness. (p. 127)

The article acknowledges a “basic tenant of embedded librarianship—geographic elsewhere-ness and pedagogical partnerships” (p. 123-124), while also identifying unequal power dynamics between librarians and teaching faculty. They claim librarians “often struggle to be viewed as full instructional partners by teaching faculty [and] are frequently left out of the educational technology decision making processes” (p. 124). In contrast to the previous examples that frame embedded librarianship as a positive model of outreach and engagement, Almeida and Pollack (2017) contend that the

“increased interest in embedment in academic libraries may reflect the fact that librarians are grappling to overcome systemic institutional disparities and a culture of exclusion” (p. 127). While many articles on embedded librarianship discuss the importance of faculty and librarian collaboration, Almeida and Pollack (2017) acknowledge that such collaboration is often complicated by power dynamics: “faculty often have the power to dictate the context of the library instructional encounters and physically control ‘access to classroom teaching’” (p. 128).

Conclusion

While use of metaphors in LIS literature is plentiful and well documented, the ramifications of employing certain metaphors in relation to the practice of librarianship is not. As the roles of libraries and librarians continue to evolve, so do the metaphors used to describe those roles. The literature regarding digital libraries and digital librarianship is not new, but, because of the pandemic, many libraries were quickly forced to rethink how to provide their services, including how they deliver instruction. Embedded librarianship provided one alternative to traditional face-to-face one-shot sessions during the pandemic and after. However, more than fifteen years after the emergence of the terminology of ‘embedded librarians’ in the early 2000s, there still is little consensus on its definition and associated practices. One area of commonality that stands out in the diverse literature, though, is the use of the embedded journalist metaphor to explain what an embedded librarian does or should do. As theorists both inside and outside of LIS have demonstrated, the language practitioners use to describe their work affects the work itself. Schön (1993) advocates for the use of “generative metaphors” to help practitioners advance their knowledge and develop their professional skills, in contrast to metaphors that contribute to “problem setting” rather than “problem solving.”

Analysing the embedded journalist metaphor through the lens of cognitive metaphor theory reveals both benefits and risks of employing the figure. A key part of applying cognitive metaphor theory and critical metaphor analysis to the professional discourse of librarians is to examine the semantic as well as pragmatic function of language. On the one hand, the comparison between the librarian who leaves the comfort and safety of their library to join an unknown environment with their users and the brave journalist who leaves the newsroom to follow troops into the battlefield seems like a productive one. The militaristic rhetoric associated with the metaphor directly contradicts earlier conceptions of librarians as passive, reactive, and collection centred. Indeed, several scholars offer embedded librarianship as an active, user centred, alternative to what they conceive of as traditional librarianship. The relationship between journalists and troops is held up as an example of the kind of collaboration librarians seek with their users. Yet, the connotations of the metaphor are not entirely positive. An examination of the history of embedded journalists and their relationship to the troops is complicated, with some questioning the objectivity of embedded journalists and claiming that the program served more as a form of propaganda rather than as a model of collaboration. Positioning embedded librarians ‘in the trenches’ and on ‘the front lines’ also seems to counteract calls for close collaboration and integration with their users. In an academic setting, some librarians may feel that they have to ‘battle’ with faculty to be granted access to students.

In contrast, the concept of the embedded librarian could be transformed into a generative metaphor by incorporating the multifaceted etymology of the term ‘embed’ and shedding some of the negative associations suggested by the embedded journalist metaphor. As Boyd and Amedegnato (2019) contend, rather than employ war metaphors, “we can customize our language with metaphors grounded in other, richer

and more appropriate domains” (p. 17), thereby reframing attitudes toward librarian roles. Metaphors related to geology and computer science grant more positive and productive associations for the future of embedded librarianship. Indeed, it is worth revisiting Kesselman and Watstein’s (2009) contention that embedded librarianship is the future of librarianship more than ten years later. More work needs to be done to interrogate the professional discourse of LIS related to embedded librarianship considering the historical developments of the profession. If the profession continues to move away from stereotypes of the collection centred mouser toward a user-centred service model, one might question whether embedded librarianship is really a subset of librarianship or if it’s just part of being a librarian in the twenty-first century.

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