

Cognitive Metaphors in the Bulgarian Economic Discourse

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Abstract—This article aims at analyzing usage of cognitive metaphors in the economic discourse, with research focusing on articles published in the Bulgarian media in the last ten years. The method applied is a critical analysis of discourse. This article highlights the manipulative role of metaphor use in economic texts.

Keywords—cognitive metaphors; media discourse; manipulation

I. INTRODUCTION

This analysis is based on Lakoff and Johnson's assumption that metaphors are not just a language phenomenon (or a literary trope), but they are rather a means of exploring and understanding the world. "Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetoric flourish – a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor. We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature." [1]. The two authors argue that we use metaphoric constructs to comprehend abstract concepts. "The fact that abstract thought is mostly metaphorical means that answers to philosophical questions have always been, and always will be, mostly metaphorical. In itself, that is neither good nor bad. It is simply a fact about the capacities of the human mind [2]. According to Lakoff and Johnson, most abstract concepts that we deal with are deeply metaphoric in their essence. We tend to think about abstract ideas in terms of metaphors, for example: life is a journey, ideas are money, love is magic, argument is war, etc. It is metaphors that provide ample opportunity to think abstractly while the economic theory itself has incorporated the use of metaphors (economic growth, economic slump, price hike, consumer basket, surge, budget hole, etc.). The less economic savvy also tend to explain economic phenomena precisely using metaphors to relate to conditions and processes easily recognizable (for example, metaphors for disease and its cure). Alan Cruse claims that "metaphors involve first, a source domain, usually concrete and familiar, second, a

target domain, usually abstract or at least less well-structured, and third, a set of mapping relations, or correspondences. For example, the argument is war metaphor uses notions drawn from the domain of war, such as winning and losing, attacking and defending, destroying, and undermining, to depict what happens during an argument" [3]. According to Todor Boyadgiev, "two different types of objects are united in the metaphor through the comparison of their images using the same feature. That's why the metaphor works semantically on two levels. It can also be defined as a hidden comparison because deep down there runs a parallel between its literal and figurative meaning" [4]. The notion of movement is very important in metaphor because it creates the potential for metaphor to evoke emotional associations and responses [5].

On the other hand, metaphors play a pivotal role in the manipulative discourse. Charteris-Black claims that, "metaphor is an important characteristic of persuasive discourse because it mediates between conscious and unconscious means of persuasion — between cognition and emotion – to create a moral perspective on life (or ethos). It is therefore a central strategy for legitimization in political speeches" [6]. As the human brain is capable of thinking of abstract concepts using metaphors; the media often abuse this capacity to manipulate public opinion. According to Lakoff, "Most of what we understand in public discourse is not in the words themselves, but in unconscious understanding that we bring to the words" [7].

This analysis studies these two metaphoric constructs in media: the economy is a living being and the economic crisis is a contagious disease.

II. THE ECONOMY IS A LIVING BEING

One of the most characteristic metaphors used in the economic discourse is the economy is a living thing. With this economic construct, the economy is represented as a living creature that takes different physiological forms. With this construct, one can discern the following metaphoric assumptions: the economy is going into some direction; the economy is falling ill, the economy is sleeping (it is going to sleep, it is waking up), the economy is dying/is getting resurrected. Such metaphors may be found in all Bulgarian media along with specialized economic publications.

Metaphors relating to motion in a particular direction are particularly characteristic for the economic discourse. The Bulgarian newspapers frequently present to their readers the upbeat news that the economy is going up.

- The economy is going up in the third quarter ("Novinar", 29 Jan 2019)
- The economy is going up ("Duma", 18 Dec 2013)
- The economy is timidly going up ("Standart", 12 Nov 2010)
- The economy is slowly going up ("24 Hours", 15 Feb 2011)
- The economy is going up ("Monitor", 5 Jan 2014)

Such spatial metaphors have been coined as a result of the juxtaposition of the location "up/down", for instance "happiness is up", but "suffering is down". The usage of such metaphors has led to expressions in the Bulgarian language such as: "this is lifting up my spirit", "I feel in top form", "I am flying in the clouds", "I have managed to swim to the surface again", "I feel up-down", "my spirit has dropped", etc. Spatial metaphors coined as a result of the juxtaposition of up and down have been in use in academic economic literature (economic growth and slump). It is the mindset that employs spatial metaphors that makes the economic cycles theory feasible (along with the Kondratieff wave theory, etc.). Other spatial metaphors are the ones related with back and forth motion.

- Bulgaria's economy is going back because of the labour market. ("Ataka", 1 March 2013)
- The economy in 2004: going forth and back and again ("Dnevnik", 28 Dec 2004)

According to cognitive linguists, metaphors arising from the juxtaposition forth -back relate to our sensory motor skills and neurons that are in charge of our sense of direction and motion. According to these metaphors as well as our physical body, it makes sense for motion to be forward rather than backward.

Along with spatial metaphors related to forward and backward motion, media texts also use metaphors with value determiners, such as right and wrong direction.

- People: the economy is going in the right direction ("Standart", 6 Oct 2013)
- How Bulgarians move in the right direction ("Dnevnik", 21 Jan 2014)

Often motion metaphors relate to our perceptions of velocity.

- 2012 projections: the world economy is going to slowly move forward despite Europe ("Capital", 27 Dec 2011)
- The economy is slowly moving ahead ("Sega", 3 Aug 2011)

- Raiffeisen bank too is expecting the Bulgarian economy to slow down ("Dnevnik", 23 Aug 2011)
- Bulgaria's economy is going up, yet slowly ("Pressa Daily", 18 Dec 2013)

Velocity metaphors also exhibit relations of value –when the direction is right (up and forward), it makes sense for velocity to be high too.

Comparisons of the economy to a living creature are also conducted in metaphors about our perceptions of sleep, going to sleep and waking up. In those metaphoric structures the economy is presented as a living being that has gone to sleep (and it is often hibernating). It is the mission of the governing elite (political and economic) to wake up the economy. Politicians often argue whether it is feasible to wake the economy up or it has passed away.

- Is the energy sector going to sleep as well? ("Novinar", 26 Oct 2010)
- It's a nightmare! The economy is going to fall asleep in September; it is never going to wake up again! ("24 Hours", 18 April 2010)
- The Prime Minister: The economy is not asleep; it has been simply done away with. ("Dnevnik", 12 Sep 2010)

Any metaphoric discourse about the economy going to sleep is certainly closely connected to death metaphors. In such metaphoric constructs the economy dies and comes back to life again, and it is the politicians that murder it and then help its resurrection.

- The Greek Minister of Development: This country's economy is facing a slow and lingering death ("Dnevnik", 27 July 2011)
- Zhelio Boychev, a socialist MP: Diankov has murdered the economy ("Dnevnik", 20 Aug 2013)
- The economy is about to slowly come back to life ("Novinar", 21 Sep 2012)
- The economy is coming to life by 1 per cent ("Standart", 15 Feb 2014)

III. THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IS A CONTAGIOUS DISEASE

Comparing the economic crisis to a disease is one of the most frequently used tools that the media employ to describe what is happening in the economy during a crisis. There are numerous examples of how such metaphoric structures are used in the Bulgarian media. The news in the media is that the economy of a certain country has fallen ill.

- The crisis has made Spain succumb to disease ("Politika", 21 June 2013)
- IMF: The European economy has taken ill and it is threatening to become contagious ("Capital", 17 April 2012)

- The global economy is chronically ill and the prospects for full recovery are rather limited ("Klassa", 25 July 2012)

The collocation contagious disease employed to describe an economic crisis features frequently in media texts. The economic crisis is portrayed as a contagious disease that wreaks havoc on the immune system and infects countries, economies and specific sectors.

- Is the crisis in Latvia going to turn contagious ("Capital", 9 March 2009)
- Is the crisis contagious? ("Standart", 1 Aug 2012)
- IMF: The crisis in Athens has infected Albania ("Struma", 31 Oct 2011)
- The economic crisis virus has wreaked havoc on the immune system of business, 39 companies and partnerships have collapsed financially, and they are calling for a court bankruptcy. ("Struma", 18 Feb 2014)
- The Eurozone has contaminated the entire European Union with recession ("Trud"; 07.11.2012).

The economic crisis is not a consequence of our mistakes but it rather spreads like a contagious disease. This metaphoric structure clearly exemplifies the subconscious manipulative message that our economy has been infected by other economies and the Bulgarian government and economic elite cannot be held accountable. According to Teun van Dijk, manipulation "is a communicative and interactional practice, in which a manipulator exercises control over other people, usually against their will or against their best interests". [8]

"How has Bulgaria contracted 'imported' economic diseases?" Garabed Minassian asks in a "Sega" newspaper article. Minassian argues further in the quoted article: "The governing elite have a convenient universal explanation for the economic and financial crisis in this country; they simply claim it is 'imported'? Whenever the question 'Are there any other domestic factors and causes?' is raised, the arrogant and rather insolent answer is always: 'No, there are not.'" (23 April 2009, "Sega"). This economics professor also reaches a very important 'medical' conclusion as a subheading: "The ruling elite have failed to understand that wrong diagnosis leads to wrong treatment." (sic) Minassian uses the same metaphors to raise the critical question of public opinion manipulation. Contagious disease metaphors blur guilt. The financial analyst Emil Hirsev shares a similar opinion: "Now government officials may take a break because recession has become a convenient excuse for all political failures. Government propaganda has repeatedly described recession as the ultimate power; recession is being compared to an act of God, a natural disaster, rather than described for what it is - an obvious failure of economic policies. Now every prime minister can shrug their shoulders saying: man proposes, God disposes! And then the prime minister could ask their subjects for more suffering, sweat, and tears and for more taxes so that the prime minister, the saviour, could protect the business and the whole nation

from this dreadful disaster. Then one can easily claim that no person at the helm of the state is to be held accountable for the crisis. However, they become a hero if they manage to "pull the country out of recession" and "lead the economy out of recession" (newspaper "Sega", 03. 12. 2012). Metaphors are very important within the persuasive political discourse. Charteris-Black claims that "metaphor influences our beliefs, attitudes and values because it uses language to activate unconscious emotional association" [9].

According to Leszek Balcerowicz, former deputy prime minister and minister of finance in Poland, "in the economy, pain is part of the treatment" (newspaper "Capital", 7 April 1997). In Europe's economic history, Leszek Balcerowicz is known as the author of the shock therapy for the treatment of Poland's economy. In his interview to the Capital newspaper, he too elucidated economic problems using medical terms.

- Journalist: You are saying that the economy itself needs to show how its various diseases need to be treated. Do you already have a diagnosis for Bulgaria?
- LB: I am using such medical terms because treating the economy is similar to treating a patient; in both cases the disease must be diagnosed and the best possible treatment should be selected. I believe that all economic diseases may be treated.

Treating the sick economy entails injections and taking medicine (bitter pills).

- Greece needs to swallow the bitter pill prescribed by IMF and the EU ("Klassa", 27 April 2010)
- By 18 October: New painful reforms in Greece ("Trud", 9 Oct 2010)
- Greece has procured its financial injection against painful reforms ("Manager", 9 July 2013)
- Great Britain is treating the crisis ... with higher velocity ("Dnevnik", 30 Sep 2011)
- The crisis is being treated with a precise diagnosis and plenty of determination. ("Dnevnik", 17 March 2009)
- Euro commissioner Andor: Eurobonds are the only medicine for the crisis ("Dnevnik", 30 July 2012)

The metaphoric construction a crisis is a disease is very similar to the construction crisis is a living creature (an enemy) coming from abroad. Metaphors that relate to this construct are also the ones that present a crisis as a mythical creature that eats up what people yield. Politicians need to combat this creature.

- Stanishev: The crisis came, but we will be outstanding again ("Dnevnik", 18 Feb 2009)
- The new recession is already in Bulgaria ("Sega", 25. April 2012)
- The recession has eaten up 4.4% of the European economy ("Dnevnik", 15. May 2009)

- Borissov and Dyankov are combating recession with 59 anti-crisis measures ("19 min.", 31. March 2010).

IV. CONCLUSION

Abstract economic concepts in the media are often presented with metaphors. Not all people are familiar with the academic understanding of those terms. Metaphors are then used as cognitive devices to illustrate those abstract terms so that we can easily perceive and understand them. Metaphors are employed to juxtapose an abstract term with a concept that we recognize in our everyday lives (motion, sleep, disease). Cognitive semantics writers argue that people tend to categorize concepts based on their experience rather than pure logic. This experience to a large extent is embedded in our physical bodies, that is, in the neuron structures of our brains. As a result, we categorize abstract concepts using our experience of motion (back and forth), disease, etc.

Metaphoric representation of abstract economic terms often serves to manipulate public consciousness. Metaphors surreptitiously make a reference to certain concepts and this reference may be purely manipulative. Whenever economic metaphors are used, the implication is that governments and multinationals cannot be held accountable for any economic trouble. Economic concepts are frequently presented when compared with living creatures that move at their own discretion and choose their own direction. The metaphor crises are diseases has a similar implication: crises are contagious, i.e. governing elites and people cannot be blamed for any. Obviously, the usage of metaphors in the political and economic newspapers also intends to entertain their readers. Metaphors are part of the word play even in economic media discourse. It is often the play-on-words that conceals a direct attempt to manipulate public opinion on abstract concepts such as economy, economic crisis (recession), inflation, deflation, budget, etc.

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