

Obese bodies, indebted families, and good students: Metaphors of austerity in the Portuguese press

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1. Introduction

This paper analyses the conceptual metaphors that structure the discourse of implementing harsh austerity policies by the Portuguese government aiming to solve the serious financial and economic present crisis in Portugal. In April 2011, Portugal had to seek for external financial assistance and the new Portuguese government has ever since sought to implement harsh successive austerity measures that were recommended by the Troika, i.e. European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund. The analysis uses corpus-based methodology and relies on a corpus of press articles extracted from Portuguese national newspapers and published between June 2011 (shortly after the application for financial help and Troika visit to Portugal) and December 2012. It follows the promising convergence between Cognitive Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (see Chilton 2004 and Charteris-Black 2005, among others) and more specifically it follows the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999) and the current trend of corpus-based approaches to metaphor analysis (Charteris-Black 2004, Stefanowitch & Gries 2006). The paper has two parts. The first part includes the corpus-based identification and interpretation of the conceptual metaphors regarding austerity policies. The second part includes the corpus-based explanation of the rhetorical, explanatory, evaluative and ideological functions of the austerity metaphors.

2. Data

Our corpus contains news and opinion articles extracted from three Portuguese important newspapers (daily newspapers *Público* and *Diário Económico* and weekly newspaper *Expresso*), that deal with political, economic and social issues related to austerity. These issues include the implementation of austerity measures, Troika's recommendations and reviews, the performance of Portuguese government, the financial and economic crisis, and impact of social, economic and political austerity (unemployment, recession, demonstrations and protests and threats of political crisis). The corpus has an extension of approximately 40,000 words. We divided the corpus into two subcorpora: one includes articles from the second semester of 2011, after the entry of the Troika and together with the first applications of austerity policies, and another contains articles from September-December 2012 in which protests intensify against the austerity policies and the government and tensions arise in the coalition government of center-right.

3. Methods

In order to identify the metaphors of austerity in our corpus and carry out a quantitative analysis, we adopted the “metaphorical pattern analysis” as proposed by Stefanowitsch (2006) and applied by Rojo López & Orts Llopis (2010) in their research about conceptual metaphors of the global

systemic crisis. This method takes the target domains of the metaphors as the starting-point of the analysis. The analysis starts from a set of lexical items belonging to the target domain, and then performs a concordance analysis to identify the metaphorical expressions associated with the relevant target concepts. Afterwards, the metaphorical expressions the lexical items belong to are identified as metaphorical patterns, and groups of conceptual mappings are established on the basis of the metaphors they instantiate. The identification of a metaphorical pattern is based on the syntactic/semantic frame the target lexeme occurs in. Furthermore, it is also supported by the existence of similar patterns in the source domain. For example, in our study, the lexeme *Estado* ('State') was selected as one of the target domain of austerity. A search for its occurrences in the corpus yielded the metaphorical expression *as gorduras do Estado* ('the fat of the State'). This expression is then identified as the metaphorical pattern 'the fat of the NP', in which there are also lexemes from the source domain, such as *as gorduras do corpo* ('the body fat'). The pattern *as gorduras do Estado* ('the fat of the State') is then considered to instantiate the metaphor THE STATE IS A (OBESE) BODY. Stefanowitsch's method offers an important reversal of the perspective for corpus-based metaphor identification, providing a more complete inventory of metaphorical mappings. Specifically, it avoids the double danger that may be involved according to the source domain perspective, namely neglect relevant source domains and ignore the literal references to the target.

In order to increase the potential of the method to identify austerity metaphors, 50 key words from the target domains of economy, finance and politics and associated to austerity policies are searched for in the corpus. The Portuguese words selected are: *avaliação* 'evaluation', *austeridade* 'austerity', *banca* 'bank', *bem* 'goods', *capital* 'capital', *compra* 'purchase', *confiança* 'confidence', *consumo* 'consumption', *conta* 'account', *contração* 'contraction', *controle* 'control', *corte* 'cut', *crédito* 'credit', *crescimento* 'growth', *crise* 'crisis', *défice* 'deficit', *despesa* 'spending', *dívida* 'debt', *economia* 'economy', *emprego* 'employment', *empréstimo* 'loan', *Estado* 'State', *finanças* 'finance', *fiscal* 'tax', *gasto* 'spend', *gestão* 'management', *governo* 'government', *imposto* 'taxes', *inflação* 'inflation', *investimento* 'investment', *juros* 'interest', *medida* 'measurement', *memorando* 'memo', *mercado* 'market', *meta* 'target', *orçamento* 'budget', *pobreza* 'poverty', *política* 'politics', *poupança* 'saving', *preço* 'price', *previsão* 'prediction', *recessão* 'recession', *reforma* 'retirement', *rendimento* 'income', *resgate* 'redemption', *restrição* 'restrictions', *riqueza* 'wealth', *salário* 'wages', *trabalho* 'work', *Troika* 'Troika'. Each lexeme is searched for all its derivatives; for instance *finanças*, *financeiro*, *financiar*, *financiamento*. Once the metaphorical patterns are identified, we proceed to describe the metaphorical mappings they instantiate. We followed the political metaphors classifications as proposed by Lakoff (1996, 2004), Charteris-Black (2005) and Moreno Lara (2008) in the qualitative analysis of the corpus and of the metaphorical expressions of austerity.

The corpus analysis is organized into three main stages. Firstly, we will isolate all the metaphorical patterns found in the corpus. We gather more than 500 metaphorical expressions. Secondly, every metaphorical pattern is individually analyzed, taking into account the nature of the source domain, the type of motivation and the mappings established across the domains, and is subsequently classified under a specific conceptual metaphor. For instance, the metaphorical expressions *gorduras do Estado* 'fat of the State', *emagrecimento do Estado* 'slimming of the State' and *o Estado tem que fazer dieta* 'the State must go on a diet' are different instantiations of the same specific conceptual metaphor THE STATE IS A BODY, which, in turn, is an instantiation of the higher-level metaphor THE STATE IS A PERSON or THE ECONOMY IS A PERSON. Thirdly, we will compare the articles of both subcorpora that were collected in different timelines (last semester 2011 and the last three months in 2012), in order to detect possible differences in the use of metaphorical language to serve a certain political or economic interest. To this purpose, we will analyze which of these metaphors are used in a positive or negative sense, as well as possible changes in the

positive/negative sense between the two time periods. Our hypothesis predicts that the articles from the first time period will have a higher number of metaphors used in a positive sense, whereas the articles from the second time period will have more metaphors used in a negative sense.

3. Results

The corpus-based analysis reveals three main conceptual metaphors used in policy responses to the economic crisis and the implementation and justification of harsh austerity policies. The first conceptual metaphor is the metaphor of diet and slimming. Diet and slimming metaphors are used to conceptualize the drastic cuts addressing the social expenses of the State, billions of Euros refunding, wages reductions, taxes and public services increase. The second conceptual metaphor addresses family debts control: national economy needs to fasten their budgets and reduce expenses likewise in indebted families; it is necessary to reorganize the national and European households. The family metaphor equates the debt problems of a national economy with the debt problems of an individual family. This is the “bad metaphor”, as Paul Krugman explains, because the national budget is not like a family budget, nor economy is like household management. The indebted family metaphor, which is probably the most insidious and misguided of austerity metaphors, is used to conceptualize the budget control policies, deficit and public expenses reduction, wages reduction and fiscal sacrifices. The third conceptual metaphor refers to good students: Portugal must fulfill the Troika goals, must meet the budgetary goals, must be different from Greece, must be regarded as a good example of the austerity measures, and must honor our commitments. Even though it is ironically used, the good student metaphor conceptualizes the fulfillment of the austerity measures, budget goals, Troika advice and EU austerity policies. These three metaphors involve opposite metaphorical moral models (Lakoff 1996, 2004). On the one hand, austerity is metaphorically conceptualized as a moral person. Specifically, austerity is seen as responsibility, moral discipline, necessary punishment, cleansing (the "debt sinners"), and as moral imperative to force Portugal to “not live above its financial possibilities”. This conservative morality gives austerity policies a positive moral connotation. The metaphors of austerity with this positive sense are more frequent in articles written during the first months of implementation of harsh austerity policies and simultaneously during "state of grace" of the new government. On the other hand, austerity is seen as immoral, as it prevents social responsibility and aspiration of the people to have a fulfilled and satisfying life and goes against democracy and the welfare state. Importantly, austerity is not a real economic policy but rather a politics of crime and punishment, sin and atonement. This negative sense of the metaphors of austerity becomes more frequent in recent months, which has been proving the failure of austerity measures.

There are other metaphors in the corpus associated with austerity. Some are specifications, parts or implications of these slimming, indebted family and good student metaphors and the associated family and moral models. For example, think of austerity in terms of household management makes us think of the economic-failure's causes (like the State deficit and debt) and solutions (austerity) in terms of household behavior. Other metaphors are applications or extensions of the metaphors of the financial crisis, including the metaphors of disease, natural disaster and the enemy, already used in the Portuguese press (and other western presses) during the global financial collapse (2008-2009) (see Soares da Silva 2009). It is thus that austerity is also seen as a remedy (which for some can heal, but for others it may make the patient even sicker), as therapy, as neoliberal catastrophe, as brutal attack and as a bomb.

4. Discussion

Once the issue of identification and description/interpretation of metaphors of austerity is addressed in our corpus, we move on to the explanatory and functional question of the role and function of these metaphors in political and economic press discourse about the implementation of austerity measures. For this purpose, we will combine the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis with the Cognitive Linguistics paradigm and develop a critical austerity metaphor analysis (see Charteris-Black 2004 for Critical Metaphor Analysis). The slimming, indebted family and good student metaphors are grounded on *image schemas* (Johnson 1987, Hampe 2005) from bodily experience. The *embodiment* of austerity metaphors turns them into cognitive models with important *ideological* functions (Dirven, Frank & Pütz 2003). The slimming, indebted family and good student metaphors serve the ideological agenda of austerity that was offered by Troika as if they were the only solution to be taken by the Portuguese government. These metaphors establish the idea that budgets deficits are always a problem and foster the belief that austerity policies will help the economies to revert to their long-term growth. These metaphors spread the idea that austerity policies transform citizens and the State into more disciplined and better persons. Consequently, the austerity metaphors legitimize the drastic cuts on State expenses. In the current context of severe recession and without signs of recovery of the Portuguese economy, great popular revolt against austerity revenues imposed by the Troika and the widespread perception that austerity and sacrifices were not worthy, these same metaphors begin to reveal their mischievous and immoral features.

We will argue that the corpus-based and cognitive discourse analysis of metaphor provides empirical evidence about the identification and interpretation of austerity metaphors and about the rhetorical, explanatory, evaluative, ideological and mythic purposes of slimming, indebted family and good student metaphors.

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The Mechanics of Metaphor

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1. Introduction

Open any broadsheet newspaper today (time of writing: Feb./Mar. 2013) and you will probably find at least one article on something to do with the Euro crisis and the various austerity measures that have been, are being, and no doubt will continue to be proposed to deal with it. The specific question addressed in this paper is how do journalists write about the novel circumstances in which we find ourselves: the probable collapse of the Euro in the wake of the unwillingness of the electorate in various countries to believe that harsh austerity measures will yield a satisfactory outcome? In other words, what sort of language do these journalists use, and specifically what role does figurative language play in their reports and feature articles? This question leads on to some more general questions about the nature of figurative language, its structure, and its function.

2. Data and methods

Following the best tradition of corpus linguistics and text linguistics, I have analysed in some detail the language of reports and features in a single issue of a broadsheet newspaper (the Guardian of 27 Feb. 2013) relating to the outcome of the Feb. 2013 general election in Italy. I have compared it with empirical evidence of figurative language in the British National Corpus and other texts. And I have also looked at more wide-ranging theoretical work (e.g. Deignan, *passim*; papers in Stefanowitch and Gries, 2006) on corpus-driven approaches to metaphor analysis.

According to the newspaper, most commentators have interpreted the outcome of the February election in Italy as a clear rejection by the Italian electorate of the austerity policies of outgoing prime minister Mario Monti, a technocrat beloved of German bankers and European finance ministers, but not (apparently) of the Italian people. In an analysis on page 17, Nils Pratley commented: “German politicians sounded so shocked [by the result of the election] that their reactions amount to little more than a wish that Italy had a different electorate.”

The front-page news story in this issue is by Ian Traynor, John Hooper, and Phillip Inman. It is headed “EU in turmoil as Italy halts austerity plan”. In addition to the front page, there are background features on the same event by John Hooper (Rome correspondent) and Lizzy Davis (Rome correspondent), Nils Pratley (financial editor), an opinion piece by Simon Jenkins (commentator and leader writer), and a leader under the heading “Austerity challenged”. A question that arises is: how much of the language in these articles (and indeed in the headlines) is figurative? There is very little figurative language in the leader. There is a lot in all the rest – both reportage and opinion.