

## Economic Crisis as a Supernatural Being in Public Discourse



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### Abstract

The aim of the research was to reveal and compare the peculiarities of economic crisis conceptualization in Lithuanian and German public discourse. The research was focused on conceptual metaphors that are characteristic of the source domain SUPERNATURAL BEING. The main research method is the analysis of conceptual metaphors based on the Contemporary Theory of Metaphor. The metaphor is understood not as a linguistic phenomenon, but as a thinking strategy, mapping from a source domain to a target domain. In this context, the significance of research into conceptual metaphors in linguistics is obvious, because metaphors are a linguistic reflection of thinking processes. Thus, by revealing the mode of conceptual metaphors as well as the ways they are realized, we partially reveal the thinking and behavioral strategies that are characteristic of a given nation. Both linguistic communities explain the crisis by the names of supernatural beings. Metaphorical expressions present the crisis as a phenomenon beyond human control and an inevitable necessity caused by supernatural beings. These features are reflected by universal conceptual metaphors in both languages, but their linguistic expression in German and Lithuanian is partly unique. Collected metaphorical expressions and research results were applied compiling the first of its kind Conceptual Metaphors Dictionary of Lithuanian Public Discourse.

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### 1. Introduction

The global economic crisis has gained exceptional media attention during last decade and became one of the most discussed concepts in public discourse. The word *crisis* refers to a problematic decision-making situation, a condition of instability or danger, a turning point. Dictionary definitions do not reveal the metaphorical nature of the crisis concept. The concept is an experiential entity that includes all information, logical and subjective experiences about a certain situation.

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The subject of the research is the linguistic expression of the crisis concept in Lithuanian and German languages, i.e. metaphorical expressions as *financial crisis gnaws automobile industry*, *economic recession tears Europe*, *crisis sneaks to rural homesteads*, *spiritual crisis plunges its roots in people's souls and societies*.

The aim of the research is to reveal and compare the peculiarities of economic crisis conceptualization in Lithuanian and German public discourse. The article aims not only to describe the conceptual crisis metaphors used in public discourse but also to reveal the trends of their usage. The analysis is limited to metaphorical expressions motivated by the source domain SUPERNATURAL WORLD. According to J. Bartminski (2012, 219), enlargement of the European Union favors communication between different nations, but misunderstandings often occur because of different views on political and social concepts. Therefore, a contrastive analysis of metaphors should focus on political and social concepts, including the economic recession.

The novelty of the research is the combination of different concept and metaphor research traditions. Cognitive linguistic ideas provide new tools to investigate language and thought language and nation interaction. Anthropologically orientated linguistic research argues that language is both embodied and situated in a specific environment and denies that there is an autonomous linguistic faculty in the mind. Cognitive linguists view meaning in terms of conceptualization. A concept is a heterogenic multidimensional unit of knowledge about the world and experience, which links various mental formations ranging from sensory images to logical structures. The concept is a broader mental formation than the meanings of language units that actualize only separate features or aspects of the concept.

Conceptual crisis metaphors in the German language were analyzed by M. White (2004), M. Wengeler (2010), M. Wengeler and A. Ziem (2013) V. Koller, M. Farelly (2010), A. Peltzer et al. (2012). Studies of Lithuanian crisis metaphors include works by J. Cibulskienė (2013, 2013a, 2012) and N. Jurgaitis (2015) with a focus on the public discourse.

The overview of the concept research reveals two different linguistics schools. The Anglo-Saxon concept research focuses on the mental structure and neurological embedding of the concept as well as the relation between language and mind. Slavic linguistic tradition emphasizes the linguistic worldview, the connection between language and culture. Both trends see metaphor as basic to human cognition and language behavior. Each language reflects a specific way of perceiving and organizing the world about us. The way of conceptualizing reality (the world-view) inherent in a given language is partly universal and partly national-specific, such that speakers of different languages may view the world in slightly different ways, through the prism of their languages. Linguistic worldview is a language entrenched interpretation of reality, which can be expressed in the form of judgments about the world, people, things or events (Bartminski 2009, 23).

The research is exclusively oriented towards the public discourse analysis. Public discourse has been chosen as it is more universal than other types of discourse, it reflects current language trends, meanwhile for example in artistic discourse and fiction individual metaphors prevail. In public discourse, we can find everyday expressions reflecting basic areas of experience.

## 2. Research Methods

The main research method is the analysis of conceptual metaphors based on the Contemporary Theory of Metaphor (Lakoff; 1993). It is the most widely spread variant of Conceptual Theory of Metaphor (hereinafter – CTM). Conceptual metaphor, or cognitive metaphor, refers to the understanding of one idea in terms of another. “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.” (Lakoff, Johnson 1980; 3). The metaphor is fundamentally conceptual, not linguistic, in nature. According to G. Lakoff, the metaphor is the interaction between two conceptual domains – source domain and target domain. Source domain is knowledge about the features of the phenomenon or the object that a human being knows from his/her physical or cultural experience. Other domain is called the target domain and is often the concept of the thing or phenomenon that cannot be felt sensually. The evidence for conceptual metaphors is inferred from linguistic expressions that occur systematically and consistently in the everyday speech. G. Lakoff claims that metaphors can influence, if not manipulate human perception. This is particularly interesting in the context of the use of metaphors in the media (1992, 463).

The conceptual metaphor theory of G. Lakoff (1980, 1993) has become the main tool in the study of abstract concepts, but modern critique (Haser 2005, Bowdle, Gentner 2005, McGlone 2007, Pragglejaz 2007, Steen 2011)

calls for consideration of recent developments, especially the three-dimensional model of metaphor proposed by G. Steen: metaphor in thinking (framing), in language (naming) and communication (changing) (Steen 2008, 231).

51 Lithuanian and 42 German metaphorical expressions motivated by the source domain SUPERNATURAL WORLD were analyzed. Metaphorical expressions were excerpted from printed newspaper texts, online portals and the Corpus of the Contemporary Lithuanian Language as well as the German Reference Corpus of Manheim Institute. The research material was collected from heterogeneous discourse, analyzed texts range from short economic news messages, reviews of stock exchanges and interviews with politicians, up to comprehensive political and economic analyses.

General scientific (analytical, descriptive, heuristic) techniques and special linguistic – contextual analysis methods are as well applied. The results gained will be processed with the help of the comparative analysis highlighting similarities and differences of the linguistic world-view of both languages. They will show what images determine the usage of metaphorical expressions in various areas of public discourse.

### 3. Results and Analysis

There are two opposing conceptual metaphors in Lithuanian and German: CRISIS IS DEMONIC WORLD and CRISIS IS DIVINE WORLD. The dichotomy of good and evil arising in metaphorical expressions correlates with the extreme character of the crisis. The economic crisis is perceived as an absolute evil (*devil, ghost, dragon, demon, gnome, grinch, monster, zombie, vampire, hell etc.*) and as a remedy for sin, a God sent a gift. Extreme oppositions are characteristic for the conceptual crisis metaphors.

Concepts of the demonic world in Lithuanian and German create a background of fear and a sense of death, e.g. *Krizės šmėkla kaimyninėse šalyse jau virto kūnu; Der Dämon von 2008 kehrt zurück. Genau drei Jahre ist es her, seit die weltweite Finanzkrise ihren Höhepunkt erreicht hat.* In addition to that the concept of blood is activated to describe an outbreak of the economic crisis that requires human victims: *Krizė gali prikelti iš karsto senas kruvinąsias šmėklas, daugelį amžių sklandžiusias virš Europos iki ES sukūrimo.*

Both linguistic communities explain the crisis by names of beings that outstrip the human powers: *<...> tikrasis krizės monstras pasaulį sukūrė vėliau; krizės baubas verčia mamas gilintis į rinkos naujoves; Das Gespenst einer neuen Krise geht wieder um <...> Ist jetzt der Krisenspuk also vorbei?* The Lithuanian discourse metaphors include characters and scenes from Greek mythology, such as the fight against the nine-headed Lernaean hydra: *Bet štai projektų, kaip nugalėti ekonominės krizės hidrą, pakanka <...>; <...> Permainų koalicija, per vargus sulipdžiusi Vyriausybę ir prisiekinėjusi drauge kovoti su krizės hidra, parodė ragus.*

Although the devil is one of the main figures of Lithuanian mythology, there are no direct comparisons of the crisis and the devil in Lithuanian discourse. The devil's allusion is only observed in a single example of idiom modification *čiupti velnią už uodegos: <...> egzistuoja dar vienas ingredientas, be kurio visos svajonės „čiupti krizę už uodegos“ taip ir liks tik svajonėmis.* In German discourse, there is a direct mapping of the concepts CRISIS and DEVIL: *Turbulenzen an den Finanzmärkten und zunehmende Rezessionsängste lassen bei vielen die Angst vor dem Krisenteufel wieder wachsen.* Unlike in Lithuanian discourse, the German crisis is associated with a vampire and a phantom: *Der Vampir ist eine Figur der Krise, denn er verkörpert die Ängste der Menschen; Die Krise ist vorerst noch ein Phantom.*

Metaphorical expressions make it appear like it is impossible to withstand the crisis. In Lithuanian public discourse economic difficulties are conceptualized as the result of a curse: *užburtas krizės ratas; nepanaikinamas krizės prakeiksmas.* In German discourse crisis is characterised by the unlimited authority: *Lebensläufe gegen die Allmacht der Krise; „Auch wenn diese Krise alles übertrifft, was wir bisher kennen“ <...>; Seitdem hat sich die Krise potenziert.*

Metaphor clusters are used in German to represent big efforts resolving the crisis. They create an impression of the Battle of Armageddon: *Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa und in der Welt – das Gespenst einer Banken- und Finanzkrise ungeheuren Ausmaßes. Alle Mächte des alten Europa haben sich zu einer heiligen Hetzjagd auf dieses Gespenst verbündet – der Papst und die Zaren in Moskau, Merkel und Sarkozy, französische Radikale und deutsche Ordnungshüter, und auch die Herrscher in den asiatischen Ländern <...>.* There are only few allusions to the Book of Revelation in Lithuanian discourse: *Europos finansinis Armagedonas; <...> trečiojo prieš šešerius metus prasidėjusios pasaulinės finansų krizės etapo pradžia – arba trečiuoju Apokalipsės raiteliu.*

Linguistic expressions of the conceptual metaphor CRISIS IS DIVINE WORLD represent the Christian understanding of God, there are no references to paganism or other beliefs. From an axiological point of view, the crisis is verbalized in three ways.

The positive assessment reflects the notion that the crisis is God's blessing, referring to the Old Testament (*Ekonominė krizė Paryžiaus Notre Dame katedrai virsta dangiška mana*) or to the allusion to the New Testament (*geroji krizės naujiena* <...>). The positive notion of the crisis is not necessarily related to the concepts embodied in the Scriptures, but also to universal propositions: *Krizė – Dievo dovana fondui; Da ist die Bankenkrise geradezu ein Geschenk des Himmels*.

In both discourses the crisis is verbalized as a purgatory: *Europa pateko į ekonominę ir politinę skaistyklą, iš kurios greito išsigelbėjimo nebus; Im Fegefeuer der Krise. ThyssenKrupp macht gigantische Verluste*. Metaphorical expressions reveal that economics and politics are treated as sin and the crisis is perceived as a the opportunity to redeem sins.

The negative assessment of the crisis is reflected in the concept GOD'S PUNISHMENT: <...> *galime teigti, kad krizė nebuvo Dievo pirštas* <...>. *Wirtschaftskrisen sind keine göttlichen Strafen für begangene Sünden* <...>.

The neutral assessment is represented by a direct comparison with the Holy Grail: *Kartais šis istorinis epizodas net pavadinamas ekonomikos mokslo Šventuoju graliu – kas galiausiai sugebės rasti pačią giliausią jos šaknį?* In German discourse the crisis is comparable to the mysterious divine warning of a future disaster: *Ist die dritte Rezession innerhalb einer Dekade schon ein Menetekel, das auf eine globale Krise schlimmsten Ausmasses hindeutet?*

#### 4. Conclusion

Both linguistic communities explain the crisis by the names of transcendental beings. Metaphorical expressions present the crisis as a phenomenon beyond human control and an inevitable necessity caused by supernatural beings. The supernatural power of the economic crisis is revealed in Lithuanian and German precedent texts – allusions to the ancient mythology and extracts from the scriptures. Figurative language of this source domain presents the crisis as a danger, but some examples indicate the crisis can be a new possibility, a positive turning point.

The source domain of SUPERNATURE in the Great Chain of Being marks the upper limit of the crisis awareness, the most complicated form of the crisis, which changes from the simplest things to divine beings. Metaphorical expressions in the source domain SUPERNATURE reveal that the crisis is linked to the time of the end of the world, Armageddon, and Apocalypse. The economic crisis as an unavoidable necessity, a manifestation independent of man's will, determined by God.

The linguistic relationship to the crisis is somewhat different in German and Lithuanian because the two countries experience they're own social and economic situations. Although the crisis is verbalized using universal metaphors, different approaches to crisis management can be observed. The two linguistic communities fight against the crisis in different ways, more active measures are undertaken in the German discourse.

This work is a complement to the paradigm of anthropologically-orientated linguistic research. Collected metaphorical expressions and research results were applied compiling the first of its kind Conceptual Metaphors Dictionary of Lithuanian Public Discourse.

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