Medical metaphors in economics news articles in English and Italian

As Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3) state in Metaphors We Live by, “our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.” From a linguistic point of view, metaphors not only exist in everyday language but in specialized discourse too, where they are frequently the result of interdisciplinary borrowings. The language of economics, replete with medical metaphors, is one of the most representative examples of this phenomenon.

This paper offers a quantitative and qualitative analysis of medical metaphors in English and Italian economics news discourse, as no research seems to have been conducted so far on the topic from a cross-linguistic perspective for the two languages in question. Medical metaphors were investigated in two corpora of economic articles published between 2014 and 2016 and drawn, respectively, from the Financial Times (https://www.ft.com/) for the English language, and Il Sole 24 Ore for the Italian language (http://www.ilsole24ore.com/).

The contrastive analysis aims at highlighting the level of pervasiveness of medical metaphors over non-metaphorically used medical terms/expressions in both corpora, and at identifying categories of metaphorical reasoning in the two languages.

The results show that both corpora were replete with metaphorically used medical terms, with the Italian corpus showing a higher tendency to use medical terms metaphorically as compared to the English corpus. Moreover, the investigation revealed ten categories of metaphorical meaning in both the English and the Italian data and equivalent realizations within the same metaphorical category. Only a limited number of cases of different realizations within the same metaphorical category were identified from the comparison between the two languages.

The results ultimately highlight that health/medical-related matters are a crucial source of inspiration in the conceptualization of English and Italian economics news discourse.