Metaphor and the euro crisis: a cross-national study of metaphor use in English and Italian editorials

This paper investigates the use of verbal and visual metaphors in economic-media discourse within the context of the euro crisis. The correlation between linguistic and pictorial metaphors is studied and text-image intersemiotic relations are analysed. The research is based on a cross-analysis of two corpora, respectively of English and Italian editorial articles published between 2009 and 2012. In both corpora, metaphorical realizations frame the economic crisis which hit the single currency and the eurozone in 2009 as a partial collapse and hint at a possible return to stability in the form of a recovery. The aim of this paper is thus to analyse the collapse/caduta and recovery/ripresa metaphors across languages in the press. The findings reveal similarities in linguistic vehicle terms and groups identified in both corpora, even though the quantitative congruence of metaphor occurrences highlights a marked difference between the English and the Italian articles: data analysis indicates a higher frequency of both the Collapse and Recovery vehicle groups in the English corpus. Moreover, the frequency patterns of image-text relations ascertained for the English corpus do not yield similar results for the Italian corpus. Metaphorical interrelations in the verbal and visual modes are pivotal in the English data, but they are only marginally realized in the Italian editorials. These results indicate that metaphorical illustrations in the English editorials accompany either the elaboration or the anchoring of the verbal metaphors, while the Italian press relies principally on a linguistic (metaphorical) message to convey meaning. The visuals of the Italian corpus are predominantly non-metaphorical images (i.e. graphs, tables), which either add or show data from the text. To conclude, in terms of image-text relations, in the British editorials integration between the visual and verbal metaphors is always achieved; conversely, in the Italian corpus images are essentially realized as independent forms, thus reducing the degree of image-text dominance in economic-media discourse.