

## **Setting the neo-liberal agenda: How metaphors help shape socio-economic “realities”**

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### **Abstract**

Based on a corpus of British financial news reports, this article discusses the influence of political and socio-economic factors on the use of metaphor in financial news discourse, seeking to establish whether neo-liberalism as a predominant economic ideology structures metaphor and whether this, in turn, is affected by events such as September 11, which changed the socio-economic setting. The approach is largely cognitive linguistic, at the same time emphasising the interactive and persuasive aspects of metaphor. Thus, metaphor is seen as a way of structuring our understanding of concepts as well as a way of interacting with the reader. In the corpus, three main metaphorical clusters are analysed. The first one presents the September-11 attacks as entities with strong impact on the economy, creating powerful allusions to war and thus setting the framework for understanding the full entailments of the other two clusters, which depict the economy as an organism and an entity/substance respectively. The latter two, it is argued, may be used to promote and support a neo-liberal agenda. Together, the three clusters provide a basis for demonstrating how metaphors may interact to create a coherent image of the economy and thus function both conceptually and interactively.

Der vorliegende Beitrag untersucht anhand eines Korpus aus der britischen Wirtschaftsberichterstattung, inwiefern politische und sozio-ökonomische Faktoren – wie die derzeit vorherrschende neoliberale Ideologie – Einfluss auf den Gebrauch von Metaphern in der Wirtschaftsberichterstattung haben, und ob sich diese sozio-ökonomische Ausgangssituation durch die Geschehnisse des 11. September grundlegend veränderte. Ausgehend von einem kognitiven Metaphernbegriff werden die interaktiven, persuasiven und konzeptuellen Aspekte der Verständnissicherung von Metaphern hervorgehoben, die anhand von drei grundlegenden metaphorischen Modellen dargestellt werden. Das erste Modell konzeptualisiert die Angriffe des 11. September als Entitäten, die einen starken Einfluss auf die Wirtschaft hatten. Wichtig sind hier die Anspielungen auf das Konzept des Krieges, mit dem zugleich die Rahmenbedingungen für die Schaffung der beiden anderen metaphorischen Modelle DIE ÖKONOMIE IST EIN ORGANISMUS und DIE ÖKONOMIE IST EINE ENTITÄT/EINE SUBSTANZ geschaffen wurden – gerade die beiden letztgenannten, so die Argumentation, begünstigten und sicherten das neoliberale Programm der folgenden Monate ab. Zusammen betrachtet liefern die drei metaphorischen Konzepte eine Basis, anhand derer dargestellt werden kann, wie durch den konzeptuellen und interaktiven Status von Metaphern ein stimmiges Bild der Wirtschaft in einem neuen Kontext entstehen kann.

### **1. Introduction**

In recent years, much research has pointed to the fact that metaphor in news discourse reflects predominant cultural, political and economic issues of society, and that in this way it helps shape the “reality” we as readers are confronted with. It is with this in mind that the present analysis of metaphors in British financial news reports is carried out. What I intend to show is that the formation and application of metaphor is influenced by economic ideology in society, such as neo-liberalism, and that events, such as September 11, result in metaphors that indirectly support ideology, and thus make us understand economic development and the forces behind it in a certain way.

The rationale behind the analysis is that in recent decades neo-liberalism has become the predominant economic ideology in most of the industrialised world, primarily due to the

successes of unrestricted markets and new technologies in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the September-11 attacks seriously challenged the viability of such a neo-liberal world economy.

In many ways, this event marked the end of one era and the beginning of a new, much more unpredictable one. In financial and economic terms, this meant that nearly a decade of unprecedented growth in the world economy was brought to an end and replaced by a period of financial turmoil and threatening recession. Neo-liberalism in its late-20<sup>th</sup>-century form was deemed dead, and it was unclear what had come to replace it.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Neo-liberalism and the Effects of September 11**

To provide a starting point for recognising the influence of neo-liberalism and September 11 on linguistic choices, such as metaphor, in financial news reports, it is important to present an overview of the development in the American and world economy in the past couple of decades.

In the wake of World War 2 (WW2), the American government chose to end its politics of isolationism and pursue a more pro-active role in the world community both politically and economically to secure peace, stability and prosperity, particularly in Western Europe. This pro-active role, together with the development of IT and communications technologies, has led to the USA being widely accepted in the industrialised world as the leading superpower, both politically and economically, and as a result the American economic policy of the 1980s and '90s, i.e. neo-liberalism, was adopted as the pervasive economic ideology.

This acceptance of neo-liberalism as the leading economic ideology has had far-reaching consequences for the world economy, opening up markets to near unrestricted competition, with non-state actors such as multinationals playing an increasingly important role. For the industrialised world, and the US in particular, this meant unprecedented growth rates throughout the 1990s, making prominent economists predict that the business cycle in its traditional sense had been broken. However, at the beginning of the new millennium this development was gradually reversed with companies beginning to show signs of difficulties,

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<sup>1</sup> Neo-liberalism is the term used for the kind of free-market ideology pursued by the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in the 1980s and 1990s. It was also adopted by the subsequent Clinton and Blair governments, although in a less liberal form. Cohn (2003:100) states the following: "As the changes initiated under Reagan and Thatcher spread to other countries, there were growing pressures on governments to adopt orthodox liberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s, with an emphasis on privatisation, deregulation, and the promotion of free trade and foreign investment".

and with the terror attacks in September 2001, which made blue-chip stocks plunge and shook consumer confidence, the American economy went into a state of actual financial panic.

From a linguistic position, this situation provides an interesting starting point for an analysis of whether concepts and meaning are constructed through metaphor in the printed press. In other words, a study of how concepts related to neo-liberalism and September 11 are presented may provide us with indications of whether metaphor structures the way we think about and understand these phenomena and thus, in a wider perspective, whether it structures the way we reason about abstract concepts in general.

### **3. Theoretical Background**

There are compelling reasons for studying metaphor when investigating how the meaning of concepts is constructed. In *Cognitive Semantics* (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987; Johnson 1987; Jäkel 1999), metaphor is assigned more than a purely aesthetic function, as proposed by comparison and substitution theories; rather, it is seen as basic to human cognition and thus salient in the way we speak and talk about the world.

In the present analysis, several aspects within *Cognitive Semantics* are relevant to discuss, e.g. the claims that metaphor

- o structures human thought, and is thus more than just an element of linguistic surface structure,
- o is pervasive and systematic, and
- o allows us to understand the abstract through the concrete.

It has been much debated since ‘*Metaphors we live by*’ (1980) whether, on the basis of linguistic evidence, it is at all possible to establish the existence of an underlying experiential base of conceptual metaphors that guides and structures our perception of the world (see among others Cameron & Low 1999; Grevy 2000; Semino 2002).

Much research has documented that metaphors are systematic and pervasive, especially in texts dealing with Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) (e.g. Boers 1997a, 1999; Boers & Demecheleer 1997; Charteris-Black & Ennis 2001; Lundquist 1995), and in this respect they undoubtedly provide us with a tool for understanding better the concepts in focus, but the question is whether they form a conceptual system for reasoning about these as well. Johnson & Lakoff (2002) argue that through e.g. conceptual metaphor, embodied meaning (i.e. “meaning grounded in our sensorimotor experience” (ibid:245)) shapes abstract

conceptualisation and reasoning, and that evidence of this exists in empirical work carried out within the field since 1980. This evidence documents among other things that it is impossible to account for conceptual metaphor without acknowledging the connection to embodied meaning and thought. Thus, in their cognitive view, linguistic metaphors are merely reflections of an underlying layer of thought that is structured metaphorically.

However, many scholars are still cautious about making such a claim and prefer adhering to a weaker view; a view acknowledging that metaphors are indeed systematic, and that, in this respect, they are necessary tools for understanding and talking about concepts. According to Quinn (1991), metaphors may aid reasoning by reconceptualising target domains through the transfer of meaning from physical-world source domains, but they do not structure understandings as such. Instead they reflect the conceptual elements that together define an underlying cultural model, i.e. already existing understandings and are “selected by speakers, and are favored by these speakers, just because they proved satisfying mappings onto already existing cultural understandings” (ibid:65). Quinn’s claim is based on a number of interviews with Americans about their understanding of marriage, i.e. a relatively well-defined concept, but does not provide arguments or evidence for the way we structure other or new concepts. What may be inferred from this is that studying a number of linguistic expressions does not provide conclusive evidence of the way concepts in general are structured, whether it is metaphorical, cultural or something entirely different.

In an LSP context, similar reservations have been voiced. It is broadly accepted that metaphors are necessary for talking coherently about new and existing concepts, but in the view of some scholars, less so for reasoning about them (Grevy 2002). Grevy argues that in LSP-texts dealing with computer technology, metaphors are essential for language to deal with the new experience and new knowledge about this technology, i.e. the development in the computer environment “requires language to signify artefacts and their function” and to handle the “rapidly changing world” (Grevy 2000:11). This argument for metaphor, he claims, can be transferred to any LSP-text that deals with something new, and where necessity exists for making the unknown well-known and familiar.

Gibbs (1999:42) suggests that when working with metaphor, the scholar should adopt an analytic approach to the question of how metaphor in language might be influenced by metaphor in thought. He lists four hypotheses that may function as a way to think more analytically. Of these, hypotheses 1 and 4 represent the extremes on a cline suggesting at the one end that metaphoric thought might change the meanings of words and expressions over

time but does not have any influence on on-line use and understanding, and at the other that metaphoric thought might function automatically and interactively in people's on-line use and understanding of language. In between are hypotheses 2 and 3, which are much in line with the way metaphor is approached above. What is important to note is that the hypotheses point to the possibility, but not the necessity, of linguistic metaphor being a surface reflection of metaphoric thought.

### **Hypothesis 2**

“Metaphoric thought *might* motivate the linguistic meanings that have currency within linguistic communities, or may have some role in an idealised speaker/hearer's understanding of language. But metaphoric thought does not actually play any part in individual speakers' ability to make sense of, or process, language.”

### **Hypothesis 3**

“Metaphoric thought *might* motivate individual speakers' use and understanding of why various words and expressions mean what they do, but does not play any role in people's ordinary on-line production or comprehension of everyday language.” (Gibbs 1999:42. Italics added by L.H.)

In the present analysis, the approach adopted is a synthesis of the above. We need metaphor to communicate about existing abstract concepts such as neo-liberalism, but also about inconceivable events. September 11 was such an event, and in socio-economic terms it created a new and unpredictable agenda. In this, it must be acknowledged that metaphor presents us with a systematic way of talking about the abstract on the basis of the concrete, and that as such it helps us understand concepts that are otherwise difficult to grasp. In this, embodied meaning as proposed by Johnson and Lakoff undoubtedly plays a role, as this provides “a natural and non-arbitrary reason for why people regularly construct the asymmetrical metaphorical mappings they do, to better understand many abstract concepts” (Gibbs 1999:46).

With this in mind, the following will deal with the specific features of metaphor in Cognitive Semantics and subsequently with metaphor in financial news reporting, making among other things the discussion of metaphor and context a focal point.

Much of the analysis carried out in financial news reports is of discourse reflecting a free-market ideology. In consequence, certain conceptual metaphors seem to be used more than others, as shown by among others Boers (e.g. 1997; 1999; 2000), who has carried out extensive work in the field. He has noted that the following conceptual metaphors tend to be

used: HEALTH, PATH, COMPULSION, WAR<sup>2</sup> rendering various linguistic metaphors such as “economic sclerosis”, “lagging behind the competition”, “growth is the engine of higher living standards”, and “retaliation against US exports”. In Cognitive Semantics, this connection between a conceptual metaphorical layer and linguistic expressions is possible because of the embodied realism mentioned above. Within this paradigm, metaphors are seen as coherent systems building on a number of gestalt structures that provide us with a physical/experiential basis for understanding and structuring more abstract experiences. These gestalt structures are also called image schemas and include orientational metaphors (UP-DOWN, ON-OFF, CENTRE-PERIPHERY, FRONT-BACK, and NEAR-FAR) and ontological metaphors (CONTAINER, PATH, LINK, COMPULSION, etc.), which are all based on human bodily experience with the surrounding world in terms of orientation, physical objects and substances. When talking about abstract, non-physical domains such as life, health, morality, social position, actions, emotions, events, etc., the schemas provide a basis for understanding these as physical objects and thus render them more comprehensible (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Johnson 1987). This basis, it is suggested, is established already in early childhood (Johnson & Lakoff 2002). However, the image schemas as such are not rich enough to provide us with very many options to talk about concepts. In consequence, we need a tool for elaboration and for talking about concepts in more specific terms. One such tool are structural metaphors, which may be considered a superstructure on the gestalt structures, making it possible to “use one highly structured and clearly delineated concept to structure another” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:61).

The mapping that takes place from a concrete source domain to a more abstract target domain is not arbitrary, but systematic. In other words, linguistic metaphors do not exist in isolation from each other; rather, they are the coherent surface realisations of the underlying conceptual systems mentioned above (Charteris-Black 2000), where the “logic” of the source domain is preserved in the metaphorical understanding of the target. Further, the choice of one set of metaphors over another directs focus to some aspects of the target while leaving others unnoticed and thus provides the writer with a powerful tool for imposing a certain economic view on the reader.

Although indicating a universal embodied basis for many conceptual metaphors, individual and cultural variation in the priority given to these is acknowledged. Thus, with values being

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<sup>2</sup> Conceptual metaphors are typically referred to in small capitals.

given different priority in different (sub)cultures and being subject to change over time, the conventionality of metaphors also varies (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:22-24). This suggests that, if not being a conceptual basis for metaphor, as claimed by Quinn, culture at least plays an important role in establishing the hierarchy of conceptual metaphors. Apart from stressing the role played by culture in determining the conventionality of metaphors, Goatly (1997) also suggests that through frequent use metaphors become conventionalised and gradually lose their distinct features as metaphors (Topic (Target) and Grounds become inaccessible), i.e. they become lexicalised. Thus, he argues for a cline of metaphoricity that places metaphors on a scale from 'dead' to 'active'. In this process, the understanding of the metaphorical content develops from being highly context-bound (pragmatic) to becoming less and less so, i.e. semantic.

#### **4. Metaphorical Features of Financial News Reports**

When discussing the metaphorical features in financial news reports, it is important to note the differences between the kind of economics presented here and the kind of economics presented in e.g. textbooks. Henderson (2000) argues that with formal and applied formal economics being theory laden, the language involved would serve the function of explaining and making easier theoretical connections. This could be achieved through the use of e.g. 'auction' and 'mechanistic' metaphors<sup>3</sup>. In news reports (in Henderson's case, *The Economist*) dealing with economic issues, however, the purpose is a different and more varied one, namely that of making readers familiar with the content, capturing the attention of specialists as well non-specialists, and being argumentative. In Boers' words it is a discourse that strikes a balance between a popular and specialised register, i.e. it draws on both formal and journalistic sources (Boers 2000). In consequence, the metaphors applied will most likely be less of an explanatory and more of an opinion-forming/persuasive nature, either directly or indirectly. The discourse examined in this article is of the latter kind, and as the analysis will show, the pervasive and systematic character of particular metaphors does not only provide understanding of the subject but invites readers to accept a certain political viewpoint.

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<sup>3</sup> Brown and Quinn (1999:135-137) argue that in formal economics the mechanistic metaphor portrays the economy as a machine-like system with which human agents interact in their exchange of goods and services. In this, it is also seen as a meta-metaphor for economic thought that "suggests a process of exchange in which the only active agent shaping the outcomes is the human subject who works and consumes after being handed a specific assemblage of productive forces". The auction metaphor provides the setting for where our choices are made and for where "the subject determines his or her economic fate".

This latter point indicates that predominant economic ideology influences the choice of metaphor, and therefore, the economic and political contexts have to be taken into account. As previously pointed out, the predominant economic ideology surrounding the discourse analysed here is a free-market ideology, i.e. neo-liberalism. As a result, the values represented by this ideology are given priority, and metaphorical models that reflect its important features (e.g. private initiative and entrepreneurship, free trade, little or no state intervention, free competition, progress, and profit maximisation) are likely to be prevalent and thus the conventional metaphors of the time. This, however, does not prevent the formation of new, active metaphors to contribute new insights into abstract phenomena such as socio-economic processes (Boers & Demecheleer 1997). The latter point is particularly important when analysing the effects of events such as September 11 on the economy.

In the discussion of metaphor's function, the following will deal more specifically with the issue of context - and corpus-based studies.

## **5. Metaphor in Discourse**

In a recent article, Charteris-Black & Musolff (2003) discuss the problems of defining metaphor in corpus-based studies where the emphasis on context is important, thus making it important to complement the conceptual definition with the rhetorical and pragmatic functions of metaphor. This point is also stressed by Chilton (1996) who argues that linguistic metaphor is both a constituent and a product of human interaction, i.e. it is both produced outside the discourse and it is discursively embedded/is interactively defined. Thus, the interactive and cognitive aspects cannot be entirely separated, but as far as the cognitive can be regarded as universal (with cultural and individual modifications), it can be "challenged" in discursive settings and change meaning through interaction. The point is that since metaphors have selective qualities, in discourse, different groups and individuals may use different aspects of metaphors to obtain their objectives.

In analysing their data, Charteris-Black and Musolff present two definitions of metaphor, a semantic one and a pragmatically oriented one to cover as many metaphors as possible. The two definitions take as their starting point the Lakoffian definition of metaphor as a mapping between two separate domains where a transfer of and shift in meaning take place. The first one, the semantic one, is applied to make sure that no metaphor is overlooked in the data:



“Metaphor is a figure of speech in which at some point in the evolution of the meaning of a word or phrase there is a shift in its use from one domain to another so that it refers to something else. This can be, for example, a shift from a physical sense to a context where it has an abstract sense (reification) or from an animate sense to a context where it has an inanimate one (personification).” (Charteris-Black & Musolff 2003:157)

This definition allows for the inclusion of a large range of metaphors and does not limit the transfer of meaning to be one from a strictly concrete to an abstract referent (thus allowing for metaphors such as CATEGORIES OF ECONOMIC ORGANISATION ARE CATEGORIES OF PERSON (ibid:154), where the transfer is between two more or less concrete referents and thus does not involve reification, but rather personification).

For the present analysis, this definition is well-suited since the data is in many ways similar to that of the above authors. This means, for instance, that the analysis deals with concepts such as neo-liberalism and the economy as well as September 11. The common characteristic of these concepts and those of other LSP-texts is that they often require reference to some sort of concrete physical or animate entity to be fully understood; a reference which can often be made more successfully through metaphor than other ways. In this, it is important to note that a particular metaphorical expression becomes the conventional one when used generally to refer to a concept in a discourse, but is creative when used only in a novel situation.

When assessing the rhetorical features of metaphor, i.e. the writer’s possibility of persuading and influencing the reader through metaphor, context plays an important role in that it provides the frame for making lexical choices that are unconventional, but appropriate in conveying a particular message. In other words, by highlighting specific aspects of the topic in question, the writer can, through metaphor, convince the reader of validity of a certain viewpoint. In the view of Charteris-Black & Musolff, this calls for a narrower definition than the above:

“Metaphor is a figure of speech in which a writer aims to achieve particular rhetorical goals such as establishing a relationship with the reader and making judgements by selecting particular words and phrases to refer to important topics when these words or phrases usually refer to other topics.” (ibid:158)

This definition points to the fact that the writer may be very deliberate in his choice of certain metaphors to obtain particular textual and interpersonal goals and that his main objective is not to create a basis for understanding the subject, but rather for convincing and persuading the reader. For the present analysis, this definition is also very appropriate as it is very likely that much of the discourse, and thus metaphor use, in relation to both neo-liberalism and

September 11 will be strongly influenced by political opinion and consequently by a need for convincing readers of the appropriateness of proposed judgement and action.

To understand how metaphor works in discourse, Chilton (1996:67) suggests looking into what makes a text comprehensible. A cognitive and interactive approach adopts aspects from Grice's co-operative principle and Sperber & Wilson's relevance theory, which specify reasons for why the metaphorical and not the literal meaning of a word or phrase is the one accepted in relation to the co-text, context and already existing conceptual models. In this respect, the lexical material of the text may lead to one or more conceptual models and the creation of certain expectations in on-going text processing. In other words, the metaphors in a text will cohere with the fundamental concepts of the surrounding culture, with other metaphors and even within the metaphor itself. The discussion of metaphor in discourse – in particular, the more rhetorical aspects - will be further elaborated on in the analysis.

## **6. Data and Method**

As mentioned in the introduction, the aim of this analysis is to establish whether a predominant economic ideology, such as neo-liberalism, influences the choice of metaphor in British financial news reports and whether events, such as September 11, result in the creation of new metaphors that influence our way of talking and understanding in the socio-economic domain.

For this purpose, reports from British national broadsheets and magazines were selected in the period from July 2001 till November 2001, covering a period of two months before and after September 11. The choice of British broadsheets over American ones (which may have seemed a more obvious choice) was made from an interest in examining how neo-liberalism is conceptualised in the country considered to be America's closest European partner in political and economic terms, as well as from an interest in analysing whether here, and thus outside the US, September 11 was considered an event powerful enough to lead to the formation and application of metaphors that would add new conceptual structures to financial news discourse.

In choosing newspapers for analysis, emphasis was put on the ones representing the quality financial press and broadly adhering to a free-market ideology. In this respect, the *Financial Times* (FT) is traditionally regarded as being supportive of Conservative policies and thus clearly of the neo-liberal agenda introduced in the Thatcher years and partly continued under

Tony Blair, although with a more populist touch. *The Guardian* (G), however, is traditionally considered to be more of a pro-Labour stance, but with the movement of the New Labour Party under Tony Blair towards the middle ground and consequently a broader acceptance of Conservative issues, this becomes less relevant<sup>4</sup>. The third newspaper is *The Economist* (E) which places itself to the right of the centre, but with New Labour sympathies.

Thus, by including these three newspapers in the corpus, a broad representation of the mainstream quality press is secured, providing a small, but reliable basis for the assessment of metaphor use in British financial news reports.

The corpus comprises 43 articles from either the print editions of the newspapers or their internet sites, amounting to 26,237 words (9,901 before September 11 and 16,336 after). The articles are all news reports<sup>5</sup> covering developments in the American economy and the world economy in the two two-month periods before and after September 11, focusing on macro-economic issues such as national income, unemployment rates, inflation and interest rates, the balance of payments, the rate of economic growth, and cyclical fluctuations. The corpus includes headlines and text.

With the two above definitions of metaphor in mind, a model was set up for identifying linguistic metaphors in the corpus. As indicated above, metaphor involves a meaning shift as well as a shift in use from one context to another. In the Lakoffian paradigm, this meaning shift involves the mapping between two separate domains, which was also the criterion for identifying linguistic metaphors in this analysis. To prevent the task of locating metaphors from becoming insurmountable, the identification was limited to metaphors that specifically cover macro-economic issues relating to the US and/or world economy. Once identified, the linguistic metaphors were ordered according to high- and low-level conceptual metaphor<sup>6</sup>. Through this categorisation, a general picture of metaphors emerged, making clear which conceptual metaphors were most frequently instantiated through the various linguistic

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<sup>4</sup> With its accession to power in 1997, the Blair government introduced the idea of the “stakeholder economy”. This includes the mutual obligation of capital and labour to secure the functioning of the community through e.g. shareholder employees getting influence on their companies by saving up pensions and social security as “shares” of their company. On a larger scale, it means a return to a traditional Conservative liberalism with state involvement in areas where the market fails, at the same time warning against state dependency (Sevaldsen & Vadmand 1997: 85;167).

<sup>5</sup> I.e. leaders, features, commentaries, etc. that all reflect strong personal opinions are omitted.

<sup>6</sup> Charteris-Black & Musolff (2003) exemplify this through the high-level conceptual metaphor THE ECONOMY IS AN ORGANISM and its lower-level derivation *The Economy is a Patient*, that inherits the structures of the higher level.

metaphors, thus providing a picture of how the economy is constructed in the discourse. Moreover, from the number of linguistic instantiations, it was possible to make an estimate of the conventionality of each conceptual metaphor, placing the high-frequency ones at the conventional end of the scale and the less frequent ones towards the more creative end. The latter kind are of particular interest with respect to the second definition of metaphor.

## **7. Analysis**

When analysing the above financial news reports, a clear pattern of metaphor emerges. There are metaphors related to the terrorist attacks and their effect on the economy as well as a number of metaphors that relate to the state of the economy and the actions taken in an attempt to influence its development. What is particularly interesting about the latter group of metaphors is that there seems to be a shift in focus of the various conceptual metaphors applied. Both before and after September 11, there are numerous examples of HEALTH, PERSONIFICATION, PATH, JOURNEY, ENTITY/SUBSTANCE and CONTAINER, but the emphasis put on each of these and the aspects they highlight change as the attacks give rise to a different economic agenda and challenge neo-liberal economic policy. Of these focus will be put on the three main metaphorical clusters that will illustrate some of the changes that take place, confirming that changes in the socio-economic environment do lead to the application of different, and possibly new, linguistic metaphors that help us understand economic development and change.

The first cluster covers the metaphors that are used to describe the attacks in terms of entities or substances that influence the development of the economy in a negative direction. This can be summarised by the high-level conceptual metaphor THE TERRORIST ATTACKS ARE A SUBSTANCE/ENTITY and the two low-level conceptual metaphors *The terrorist attacks are missiles/bombs* and *The terrorist attacks are a substance/entity that causes change*. The second cluster covers metaphors that describe the economy and parts of it as animate, and mostly human. For this, the high-level conceptual metaphor THE ECONOMY IS AN ORGANISM and its lower-level extensions *The state of the economy is the state of health of a person* and *A category of the economy is a category of person* are used. The third, and final, cluster comprises metaphors that conceptualise the economy as an entity or substance. For this the high-level conceptual metaphor THE ECONOMY IS A SUBSTANCE/ENTITY is used and further specified through among others the three low-level metaphors *The economy is a roller*

*coaster*, *The economy is a bouncing ball* and *The economy is a (flexible) object*. In the following, these three high-level conceptual metaphors will be analysed in detail.

### **7.1. The Terrorist Attacks are a Substance/Entity**

The first conceptual metaphor to be dealt with in this analysis is probably also the most important one as it can be said to establish the frame for understanding the full entailments of the other conceptual metaphors. A general characteristic of this conceptual metaphor is the seriousness with which the authors view the economic consequences of the attacks. Although there was some indication before September 11 that the American economy was slowing down, there is no doubt that the attacks were seen as the event that sent it sliding into recession, and with that into severe problems. Initially, this assessment was tentative, but within a few weeks it became a fact in the view of many:

#### ***The terrorist attacks are a substance/entity that causes change***

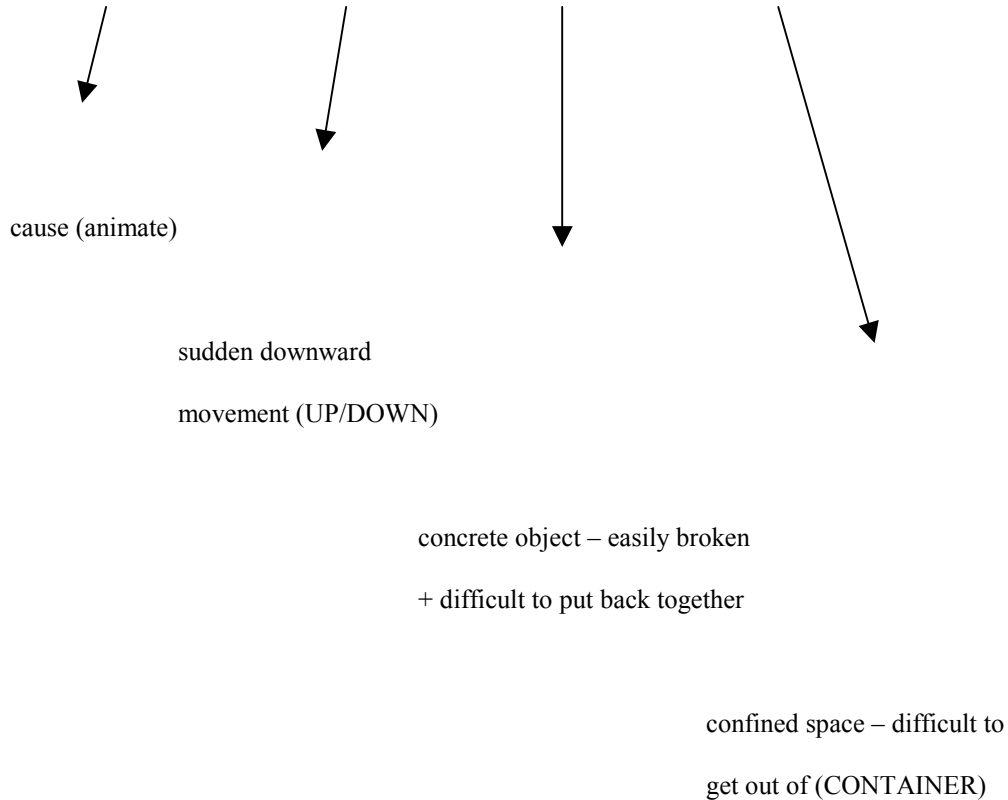
- (1) The attacks on New York and Washington could be a **catalyst** for recession (G 13.09.01)
- (2) (...) the attacks are likely to **deepen** the economic downturn (G 13.09.01)
- (3) On the face of it, the economic **implications** [of the attacks] are huge (E 17.09.01)
- (4) (...) the attacks were a long-run economic **depressant** (FT 25.09.01)
- (5) (...) the terrorist attacks have **plunged** the fragile economy into recession (G 26.09.01)
- (6) (...) the internal crisis **triggered** by the terrorist attacks (G 01.10.01)
- (7) (...) the terrorist attacks have significantly **heightened uncertainty** in an economy that was already weak (...) the Fed open market committee said (FT 02.10.01)
- (8) (...) since September 11 **pushed** an already flagging US economy over the edge into contraction (G 07.11.01)

In these examples, the attacks are depicted as causes for a change for the worse. These causes are both animate, inanimate, and substances. This picture is further enhanced by the use of other metaphors within many of the utterances, such as UP-DOWN, CONTAINER, PATH and PERSONIFICATION metaphors. Thus, in the example from the Guardian (fig. 1), the seriousness of the situation is further emphasised through the mixing of various metaphors within the same clause.

**Figure 1: Example of mixed metaphors**

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(5) (...) the terrorist attacks have plunged the fragile economy into recession (G 26.09.01)



In fig. 1, the terrorist attacks are seen as the animate cause of devastation. The metaphorical expression *plunged* adds to this picture by depicting a sudden downward movement into something unpleasant, in this case *recession*, which is seen as a confined space which it is difficult to get out of. Both *plunged* and *into recession* relate to fundamental concepts in our interaction with the world, i.e. to UP/DOWN, where DOWN is fundamentally seen as being bad, and CONTAINER, where the content is excluded from contact with the surrounding world or is at least very difficult to reach unless an opening appears. And finally, the metaphor *the fragile economy* gives the reader the impression of the economy being a concrete object that if broken will be scattered into many small pieces difficult to put back together. By combining (conventional) metaphors within the same utterance, the writer establishes not only a conceptual ground for understanding the topic, but he also subtly adds opinion and thus indirectly invites the reader to accept his judgement.

The above metaphors are only examples of a larger set of metaphors relating to the attacks as causes for change. However, being representative of that set, they show that in assessing the effects of the attacks, the writers both employ metaphors that are conventional in describing the cyclical movements of the economy and consequently may not add any distinct judgement to the development, and metaphors that are more creative and clearly rhetorical in nature. The following utterances include metaphors that seem to have been chosen to promote a distinct judgement of the attacks and their consequences; with the last example, in particular, emphasising the serious situation through the mixing of metaphors

- (1) The attacks on New York and Washington could be a **catalyst** for recession (G 13.09.01)
- (4) (...) the attacks were a long-run economic **depressant** (FT 25.09.01)
- (8) (...) since September 11 **pushed** an already flagging US economy over the edge into contraction (G 07.11.01)

These metaphors follow the second definition of metaphor and are thus more pragmatic.

Under the high-level conceptual metaphor THE TERRORIST ATTACKS ARE A SUBSTANCE/ENTITY, the attacks are also conceptualised as missiles or bombs hitting the economy; an image undoubtedly reflecting the way the airplanes penetrated the World Trade Center and Pentagon and subsequently exploded. The linguistic instantiations of this metaphor can roughly be divided into two groups: the metaphors that are relatively neutral in their conceptualisation and the metaphors that conceptualise the attacks and their effect in very powerful terms:

*The Terrorist attacks are missiles/bombs*

- (9) The attacks on New York and Washington have **wreaked havoc** on financial markets (G 13.09.01)
- (10) (...) the immediate economic **impact** of the attacks (G 13.09.01)
- (11) This time, with the **carnage** [in the economy] at home not abroad, the **impact** could be even bigger (E 15.09.01)
- (12) Second is the importance of distinguishing between short-term responses and the longer-term **impact** (E 17.09.01)
- (13) The immediate **fallout** seems bound to be negative (E 17.09.01)
- (14) (...)the **devastating impact** [on the economy] of the terrorist strikes (G 21.09.01)
- (15) (...)the **fallout** from the US [economy] would spread across the Atlantic (G 21.09.01)
- (16) (...) to limit the economic **damage** from the terrorist attacks of September 11 (FT 01.10.01)
- (17) September 11<sup>th</sup> had an immediate and dramatic **impact** on economic activity (E 31.10.01)

- (18) (...) the economic **impact** of that shock [of the events of September 11] became clearer (E 01.11.01)

All the above metaphors deal with the economy being hit, but some of the metaphors are more powerful than others in that they conceptualise a war-like situation with serious ramifications. In the following utterances from the first three weeks after the attacks, the metaphors depict the economy as a battlefield or the site of a nuclear attack, providing a sense of complete destruction and devastation:

- (9) The attacks on New York and Washington have **wreaked havoc** on financial markets (G 13.09.01)
- (11) This time, with the **carnage** [in the economy] at home not abroad, the impact could be even bigger (E 15.09.01)
- (13) The immediate **fallout** seems bound to be negative (E 17.09.01)
- (14) (...)the **devastating impact** [on the economy] of the terrorist strikes (G 21.09.01)
- (15) (...)the **fallout** from the US [economy] would spread across the Atlantic (G 21.09.01)

Although these metaphorical expressions are conventional, in pragmatic terms, the choice of them is well in line with the rhetorical strategy adopted by the American president, George W. Bush, in the days following September 11. Already on September 12, the President makes references to war in his first formal speech and thus points to the themes that will accompany US policy and actions in the immediate future: Evil, Terror and the War on Terrorism; a line of policy that reflects public sentiment very well at the time (Silberstein 2002). The choice of WAR metaphors to describe the effects on the economy may well have been made to mirror the strategy adopted by President Bush, and it thus serves a political and rhetorical purpose apart from a cognitive one. Adopting aspects from conversation analysis, Chilton talks of ‘formulation’ of a metaphor when a speaker (in this case mediated by the reporters) introduces a new metaphor with the intention of presenting a new concept, or some new social relationship (Chilton 1996). Through the WAR metaphor a topic is formulated in terms of a source concept that allows the reporters to present a picture of the economy and the reasons for its trouble that are quite different from the ones of the time before September 11. Along with the more “neutral” conceptualisations of the attacks and their effect on the economy, it allows them to blame perpetrators outside the system for the difficulties rather than the system itself. In other words, with the general belief up till September 11 being that the pursuit of neo-liberal economic policies would lead to higher growth rates and increased welfare for all, at least in the US and much of Europe, it would be problematic to accept flaws in the system that could lead to the direct opposite situation. In this sense, the September 11 attacks could



be seen as a “convenient”, but horrifying explanation. Moreover, through conceptualising the terrorist strikes as nuclear attacks whose fallout can spread and cause long-term damage and devastation, the reporters get a powerful tool for appealing to the world community for help in fighting this war. Again, this follows the rhetorical strategy of President Bush who appealed to the world community to stand on America’s side, arguing that “This is the world’s fight. This is civilization’s fight. (...)” (Silberstein 2002:12).

In conclusion, the use of metaphors in relation to the attacks is a mixture of metaphors that are conventional in financial news discourse, and as such do not create a conscious image in the reader, and metaphors that are creative instantiations of existing conceptual metaphors, intended to make the reader understand the attacks in specific terms and to help the writer pass value judgement as well as promote a particular political viewpoint. Thus, the metaphors have both a cognitive and a pragmatic function as part of the discourse. In this, it is important to note that the conceptualisation of the attacks as an outside entity or substance that severely impacts on the economy, making allusions to war, provides the writers with the possibility of diverting readers’ attention from problems within the economic system itself, focusing on plausible external reasons instead. Being outside direct influence in the media, the reader has little choice but to accept this focus of the discourse. In this respect, Chilton emphasises that although free to do what they want with the cognitive resources passed on by political leaders through the media, readers have a tendency to accept and assimilate what is provided – especially in times of crisis (Chilton 2003:1).

## **7.2. The Economy is an Organism**

Under this high-level conceptual metaphor, one of the most frequent extensions is *the state of the economy is the state of health of a person*. Much of the research carried out in financial news discourse (e.g. Boers 1997; Semino 2002; Charteris & Musolff 2003) confirms that this metaphor is very common in reports reflecting a free-market ideology. A reason for this is that when the economy is conceptualised as a person – as an ontological metaphor - , we can very easily relate what happens to it to our own bodies and our experience as humans (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:33). This understanding is extended via the HEALTH metaphor, which provides us with the possibility of conceptualising the state of the economy in terms of our own health.

Considering the slowdown of the economy before September 11 and the economic impact of the attacks, it is not surprising that many of the metaphors found relate to *bad health*, *weakness* and *recovery*:

*The state of the economy is the state of health of a person (after September 11)*

- (19) It [the current state of the world economy] is not very **healthy** (G 13.09.01)
- (20) (...) it followed a **rash** of bad economic news (E 15.09.01)
- (21) (...) an already **enfeebled** economy (G 21.09.01)
- (22) (...) weakening prospects for future **recovery** (FT 25. 09.01)
- (23) (...) the rapid slowdown in the US had started to **infect** Europe (G 27.09.01)
- (24) (...) to **revive** US economic growth (FT 02.10.01)
- (25) There are three reasons for expecting a **mild** recession (E 20.10.01)
- (26) (...) the impact of a global economic **weakness** on a US **recovery** (FT 01.11.01)
- (27) (...) tax cuts and spending to **resuscitate the ailing** economy (G 01.11.01)

When comparing the HEALTH metaphors after September 11 with those of the two months before, there is no significant difference in the choice of linguistic instantiations. However, before the attacks there seems to be a tendency towards using metaphors that, together with the co-text, are less gloomy in their conceptualisation of the economy, and as late as September 10 an optimistic outlook is still retained:

THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY IS THE STATE OF HEALTH OF A PERSON (**Before September 11**)

- (28) The international outlook remained cloudy with **weakness** in many parts of the world (G 18.07.01)
- (29) The US economy is likely to **improve** (G 18.07.01)
- (30) (...) the Federal Reserve was conscious of the need to retain US economic **vitality** (FT 21.07.01)
- (31) Paul O'Neill (...) said he expected the currently **enfeebled** US economy to return to something approaching normality (FT 23.07.01)
- (32) New evidence of the global economic **malaise** emerged today (G 27.07.01)
- (33) The American economy still seems far from **recovery** (E 04.08.01)
- (34) (...) with output growing at an **anaemic** 0.7% annual rate (G 22.08.01)
- (35) (...) a US **recovery** would be “slow in coming” (G 30.08.01)
- (36) (...) Mr Solbes said he still expected a **recovery** (FT 10.09.01)
- (37) (...) Mr O'Neill [said] (...) that America was in a “cyclical downturn” and would **revive** later this year (FT 10.09.01)

Characteristic of these metaphors is that, with a few exceptions, they are highly conventional and are often not recognised as metaphors by readers. This entails that the writer can exploit the metaphors in subtle ways, by including some inference patterns from the source and excluding others, to promote a certain ideological stand. In neo-liberal terms, a slowing down of the economy is considered undesirable as it means a lower level of economic activity, weakness in the system and thus difficult times for the actors involved. This state can be compared to a person's state of health where a high level of physical activity indicates good health and a low level may be a symptom of bad health and illness (Boers 1997). Similarly, if the level of activity rises in the economy, this is regarded as a positive development and a strengthening of the system. Like the body, the economy will have recovered.

The most important difference between the two sets of metaphors is that the frequency of HEALTH metaphors after the attacks is higher (63 instances as opposed to 32 before, yielding percentages of 0.39% and 0.32% respectively of the total number of words in each set ). On the basis of this and the metaphors used to conceptualise the attacks and their direct effect on the economy<sup>7</sup>, a mental model of the state of economic affairs is created; a model that creates a coherent image of the present state of the economy and leaves the reader with a sense that things have changed for the worse.

Another cluster of metaphors, which elaborates on the above, is *A category of the economy is a category of person*, which includes conceptualising the economy as an infant:

*The economy is a person (Before September 11)*

- (38) But with the world's largest economy **stuttering** to a halt (G 11.08.01)
- (39) (...) other analysts detected signs that the economy may finally be starting to **respond** (G 22.08.01)
- (40) US economy **crawls** along (G 29.08.01)
- (41) The world's largest economy would not be able to **avoid** its first recession in a decade (FT 08.09.01)

*The economy is a person (After September 11)*

- (42) (...) US growth has slowed to a **crawl** (G 13.09.01)
- (43) (...)when the economy **held its breath** (E 15.09.01)
- (44) (...) the economy was also **stuttering** on the brink of recession (E 15.09.01)

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<sup>7</sup> The other conceptual metaphors mentioned in the introduction to the analysis should of course also be considered to get a full picture. For the sake of simplicity, however, they are not included here.

- (45) (...) all the world's leading economies are now **battling** with slowing growth (FT 19.07.01)
- (46) (...) the economy was **saved** from outright contraction (E 04.08.01)
- (47) (...) it [the American economy] has the strength to triumph, but has for the moment **its back** against the wall (G 24.09.01)
- (48) (...) the **struggling** economy (G 26.09.01)
- (49) (...) **rescuing** the economy from its deflationary spiral (G 27.09.01)
- (50) (...) the **stumbling** US economy's impact on the global economy (FT 01.11.01)

Like the HEALTH metaphors, most of these metaphors are conventional, and there is no significant difference in what the metaphors highlight before and after September 11, i.e. a large number of the metaphors involve conceptualising the economy as a struggling and stumbling person. However, like for the HEALTH metaphor, there is a significantly larger number of PERSONIFICATION metaphors after the attacks (84 as opposed to 40 before, equalling 0.51% and 0.40% respectively of the total number of words in each set). According to Charteris-Black and Musolff (2003), metaphors that involve personification do not only encourage identification with the target, but also invite us to feel empathy with the economy when it involves words such as *struggling* and *rescuing*. In the utterances where the economy is depicted as an infant this may be even further elaborated to involve feelings of nurturing. On the face of it, this is inconsistent with the basic tenets of neo-liberal ideology, which specify that generally the economy functions the best if it is left to its own doings with as little intervention from the government as possible. The task of the government is basically to provide the best possible conditions for it to operate. However, in case of extreme situations, such as the one created by September 11, the government should provide the necessary aid. Using metaphorical expressions such as *rescuing the economy* indicates that the economy is in a situation which it is unable to manage. Thus, the notion of an economy struggling to survive in the aftermath of the attacks may once again be an incentive for accepting government intervention.

Although mostly conventional, the above instantiations of THE ECONOMY IS AN ORGANISM metaphor do provide us with a particular coherent image of the economy due to the selective mechanisms of metaphor. To this should be added that many of the above utterances also include instantiations of other metaphors, among these the PATH metaphor that includes moving towards a goal, passing locations, meeting and overcoming obstacles, etc. Here the PATH metaphor adds to the image of an economy doing badly through expressions such as

*rapid slowdown, far from recovery, stuttering to a halt, and slowed to a crawl.* In other words, we are made to sympathise with the economy and accept the actions proposed by the writers.

### 7.3. The Economy is an Entity/Substance

The last conceptual metaphor to be included in this analysis is interesting for various reasons. First of all, there are major variations in what is highlighted before and after September 11 and second, it is one of the most basic metaphors in Cognitive Semantics, i.e. it belongs to the group of ontological metaphors. Finally, the three low-level conceptual metaphors analysed here - *The economy is a roller coaster*, *The economy is a flexible object* and *The economy is a bouncing ball* – are also closely related to the orientational metaphor of GOOD IS UP, BAD IS DOWN/MORE IS BETTER, LESS IS WORSE.

The two first low-level conceptual metaphors in this section (*The economy is a roller coaster* and *The economy is a (flexible) object*) are realised to a much lesser degree before September 11 than after. The reason is clearly to be found in the fact that with the attacks the last hopes for a sustained economic level disappeared, and fear and uncertainty took over, suspending most economic activity and leading to a large number of metaphors focusing on the continuous deterioration of the economy. Thus, the conceptual metaphor *The economy is a roller coaster* highlights almost exclusively the downturn and not the upturn:

#### *The economy is a roller coaster (After September 11)*

- (51) Before last month's attack, economists had hoped for an **upturn** in the US economy this autumn (G 03.10.01)
- (52) Another reason for thinking that America's recession may turn out deeper than expected is that the world is in an unusually synchronized **downturn** (E 20.10.01)
- (53) (...) the attacks on New York and Washington might have exacerbated the **downturn** that was already gripping the world before September 11 (G 01.11.01)
- (54) (...) the US **downturn** could turn into a sustained slump and drag the rest of the global economy down with it (G 07.11.01)

This should be seen against the fact that *The economy is a bouncing ball* is almost entirely realised before September 11, reflecting a belief in the strength of the economy:

- (55) People are questioning whether the US will **rebound** quickly (G 11.08.01)
- (56) (...) US economy is in a cyclical downturn and will **bounce** back this year (FT 10.09.01)

Almost the same applies to the conceptual metaphor *The economy is a (flexible) object* although it (like the HEALTH metaphor) provides a more positive outlook before September 11 by focusing on both positive and negative aspects of economic development:

*The economy is a (flexible) object (Before September 11)*

- (57) The economy may have **shrunk** (E 21.07.01)
- (58) (...) economic fundamentals remained sound and “should provide a solid foundation for renewed **expansion**” (FT 21.07.01)
- (59) (...) a full year in which the American economy has **expanded** at substantially below its trend growth rate (FT 28.07.01)
- (60) (...) the economy was saved from outright **contraction** (E 04.08.01)
- (61) (...) GDP figures (...) will show the economy slowed to a standstill even **contracted** during the second quarter (G 22.08.01)
- (62) (...) the rate of **expansion** was the weakest since early 1993 (G 29.08.01)

*The economy is a (flexible) object (After September 11)*

- (63) (...) the US economy could **contract** by 0.8% (G 13.09.01)
- (64) Many economists think the economy will **contract** in the third quarter (E 17.09.01)
- (65) (...) to limit the economic **damage** from the terrorist attacks of September 11 (FT 01.10.01)
- (66) Most independent economists believe the US economy is already **contracting** (G 03.10.01)
- (67) US economy **shrinks** for the first time in eight years (FT 31.10.01)
- (68) The longest period of uninterrupted economic **expansion** in US history ended in the third quarter (FT 31.10.01)

Apart from being conceptualised as a flexible object that can change size, be hit and damaged these metaphors also derive their meaning from the image schema of UP-DOWN in the sense that MORE IS BETTER (‘expansion’) and LESS IS WORSE (‘contraction’). Lakoff and Johnson (1980:22) remind us that MORE IS UP/GOOD IS UP are values deeply embedded in our culture that cohere with the most basic metaphorical concepts that we use. Thus, the above linguistic metaphors are not likely to be very conspicuous to readers, but the fact that the number of instantiations is far larger after September 11 (57 as opposed to 19 before, equalling 0.35% and 0.19% respectively) makes the metaphor powerful in subtle and indirect ways.

The relation to the UP-DOWN schema also applies to the other two low-level conceptual metaphors where the upward movement is regarded as a positive development of the economy.

## 8. Concluding Remarks

The data analysed in this article indicates that the use of metaphor is influenced by events and ideology in the socio-economic field. Although covering a rather limited corpus that focuses on a few significant metaphorical clusters, the analysis clearly demonstrates that metaphor in British financial news discourse is both systematic and pervasive, and that it consequently structures the way we talk of and understand economic concepts. In this, it is also worth noting that in many sentences mixed metaphors are found, rendering a much stronger image of the state of the economy than instantiations of a single metaphor would. However, the corpus does not provide enough evidence of the relation between linguistic surface structures and an underlying level of thought structured metaphorically, although it is possible to make tentative assessments like the above. For this, much larger corpus studies as well as psycholinguistic studies are needed.

Furthermore, there are indications that events such as September 11, which changed the whole outlook of the Western world, can be used by writers to establish very powerful clusters of metaphor in that they set the frame for understanding other clusters of economic metaphors in the discourse as well as provide support for a neo-liberal economic policy by directing attention to outside reasons for the trouble of the economy. This said, the corpus is not large enough to establish a clear relation between neo-liberal ideology and the choice of metaphor. As mentioned, there are indications that a connection exists – the many metaphors can be interpreted in this way, given the context they are presented in – but the question remains if the same metaphors would be interpreted differently in a different context. To clarify this question, it will be necessary to analyse more thoroughly various economic ideologies and how they are constructed in journalistic discourse.

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