

METAPHORS IN SWEDISH JOURNALISM: THE LANGUAGE OF BUSINESS

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ABSTRACT. This paper discusses metaphors from the standpoint of cognitive semantics and explores conceptual metaphors in the Swedish language of business, as present in the journalistic language of everyday newspapers. The introduction briefly reviews the history of metaphorical research, followed by a selection of conceptual metaphors found in the economic articles of two Swedish dailies 'Dagens Nyheter' and 'Göteborgs Posten'. This paper also analyses the functions performed by metaphors in economic articles.

Throughout its long – indeed more than two-thousand-year – history, the true nature of metaphor was not widely recognised. In traditional teaching, metaphors were treated as an anomaly, a deviant or unusual device confined to literature, rhetoric and art. Some, like John Lock for instance (cf. Goatly, 1997, p. 1), even thought they were dangerous for logical reasoning. Those who saw metaphors as something more than just figures of speech, like Aristotle (who was the first to define them) were in a minority. However the situation has changed in recent decades and new theories have appeared with evidence suggesting that metaphors are much more prevalent in the language than used to be acknowledged.

More importantly, claims have been made that metaphors are not only basic to language, but to our thinking as well. Linguists, psychologists and philosophers maintain nowadays that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical in nature. Some cognitive linguists like George Lakoff and his colleagues see the patterns that metaphors form in the language as linguistic evidence of the way our minds work. Metaphors

put in this perspective enable one to think and talk about one kind of thing in terms of another not only in special circumstances, as literary discourse, but also in every-day communication. As it is argued by cognitive linguists, literal usage of the language is nowhere near as widespread as used to be thought.

Metaphors are now recognised to be pervading the language that used to be considered literal. They are of interest both to pragmatists and semanticists as they are concerned with both the actual use of the language and the lexicon. Some of them cannot be understood without a context, others find their way into dictionaries, become lexicalised and sometimes revived and used as metaphors again.

The following typographical conventions have been used in this paper:

Items **in bold** are Vehicle-terms

Items underlined are Topic-terms, e.g. Man is a wolf

'DN' and 'GP' refer to 'Dagens Nyheter' and 'Göteborgs Posten' respectively

METAPHORS IN ECONOMICS

Being so omnipresent could metaphors be found also in economics, a field traditionally perceived as 'scientific' or 'technical'? A fleeting analysis of any economics textbook would prove this to be so. Economic textbooks seem to abound in metaphors, as seen in the following examples:

capital **mobility**, **balance** of trade, great **depression**, **consumption**, economic **growth**.

These are clearly lexicalised, 'dead' metaphors, as some linguists call them, and an average native speaker of English would not see them as metaphors, but in fact they do have a clear metaphorical origin.

METAPHORICAL PATTERNS IN SWEDISH ECONOMIC ARTICLES

The finance sections of two Swedish newspapers 'Dagens Nyheter' and 'Göteborgs Posten' from the period between 23rd April 1999 and 6th May 1999 were analysed as linguistic data in the search for metaphors in Swedish economic articles. Research has identified several conceptual metaphors which are characteristic. One of the metaphorical patterns found in the articles analysed can be described by the following conceptual metaphor:

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS ARE METEOROLOGICAL CONDITIONS

Examples:

Sängtillverkaren Hästen hamnade i **blåsväder** sedan ledningen börjat dela ut skriftliga varningar om uppsägning till anställda som av olika skäl inte ville arbeta övertid. (GP)

... i den reala ekonomin börjar ljuspunkterna skönjas. Men än finns **orosmoln**. (DN)

Det finns några **moln** på Ericssons **himmel**. Ett är konkurrenten Nokia som också nafsar dem i bakhasorna. (DN)

Utan vår egen förskyllan har vi upplevt den värsta finanskrisen sedan andra världskriget, men vi **har klarat stormen** ganska bra, vår valuta är fortfarande stark, vi har inte devalverat den, vår valutaserv är en av de största i världen ... (DN)

Båda vägar kräver ett bättre företagsklimat, ... (GP)

One clearly notices that the economic situation of a company or a country can be successfully described in Swedish in terms of the terminology used in weather forecasting. The vocabulary used is visibly of meteorological nature. In direct translation from Swedish the words 'windy weather', 'storm clouds' and 'a storm' are used to describe unfavourable economic conditions. Moreover, the word 'climate' is used in this context, which is also used in a similar way in English, incidentally.

Another conceptual metaphor found in the economic register is:

BUSINESS IS WAR

Striden inom Skattebetalarnas förening trappas upp. (DN)

Wallenbegargarna har inte råd att förlora den här **bataljen**, men det är svårt att se hur de ska vinna den. (GP)

Europa Möbler vill bli större för att ta upp **kampen** med Ikea och Mio. (DN)

En seg **maktkamp** pågår mellan ägarna av båda bolagen. (DN)

Snacka om **krigsförklaring**. (GP)

Scanias ägare till **motattack** (DN)

När det gäller framtida **allianser** blickar han mot Europa snarare än övriga Norden. (DN)

Definitivt finns det **offensiva** möjligheter och kombinationer för Scania. (GP)

Apparently, judging by the metaphors, businessmen are engaged in all-out warfare. The competition being fierce, they work out military strategies, enter into alliances, launch offensives, fight battles, engage in combats and at times take up defensive positions.

But the world of business is not always that brutal. Sometimes less 'violent' metaphors are employed and doing business is like joining in a game. Here is another conceptual metaphor:

BUSINESS IS A GAME

Examples:

När Posten missade möjligheten att köpa transportföretaget ASG förra måndagen var det sjabbel på högsta nivå. Nedan har DN kartlagt **spelet** bakom. (DN)

Striden förs med aktieköp, **utspel** och egna beräkningar ... (DN)

Lika villkor på samma **spelplan**, efterlyser Göran Forssén vice verkställande direktör vid Svenska åkeriförbundet och framför en branschs nödrop för överlevnad om att **spelreglerna** ska bli lika för alla. (DN)

ORIENTATIONAL METAPHORS

A large and important group of metaphors in economic texts includes those connected with spatial orientation. Accounts of economic conditions teem with verbs of movement. The most important conceptual metaphors here are: MORE IS UP; LESS IS DOWN. Although horizontal movement can also be used to form metaphors in the economic register in Swedish, e.g. 'att backa'. A number of economic concepts are in constant movement – prices, shares, interest rates and currencies go relentlessly up or down. The vocabulary is impressively extensive here.

Examples:

I går **steg kurserna** inledningsvis med några procent. (DN)

lönelyft (DN)

Rörelsemarginalen ökade (DN)

Aktiekurserna skjuter i höjden. (GP)

De korta räntorna klättrade ... (DN)

Priset på bilar snuddar sitt tak. (GP)

att få ner kostnaderna (DN)

Skanska faller på stark börs (GP)

... priset på dieselolja sänks. (DN)

Sonys vinst fortsätter **rasa** (DN)

... Japans BNP sjunker med 1,4 procent (DN)

Göran Collert hoppades att räntebotten nu var nådd "annars är det tecken på att ekonomin är rutten". (DN)

Det smalare OMX-index **backade** 0,07 procentenheter ... (DN)

When one talks about economic outlook and prognoses in Swedish, the sense of sight lends itself well to being used to form a metaphor. It is also used to talk about understanding, analysing and to describe phenomena that are easy to understand. The following conceptual metaphors demonstrate this:

SEE = UNDERSTAND/KNOW

SEEING THE LIGHT = GOOD ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

SEEING DARKNESS = BAD ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Totalt kan man **se** ett svagt **ljus** för de asiatiska länderna och i vissa länder ser det riktigt bra ut. (GP)

Men svenskarnas **syn** på landets ekonomi är inte lika **ljus**. (DN)

Koncerndirektör (...)Leiv Nergaard **ser** dock **ljuspunkter** i den allra senaste prisutvecklingen. (DN)

För industriföretagen syns ingen **ljusning**. (DN)

... men på kort sikt ser det fortfarande relativt **mörkt** ut för den japanska ekonomin. (GP)

Ett litet **ljus** i **mörkret** är att vi lyckades rädda 35 av de 40 jobben på driftssidan ... (DN)

Då få **ljusglimtarna** syns bland annat inom personbilsområdet ... (DN)

TEMPERATURE

Temperature can also be a source of information about economic conditions. The conceptual metaphors here are:

HOT IS ACTIVE/DESIRABLE

TOO HOT IS BAD

Examples:

Två områden som är särskilt **heta** är byggsektorn och IT. (DN)

Menar du att Mitsubishi inte är en **hetare** samarbetspartner än någon annan. (GP)

... den amerikanska ekonomin börjar bli **överhettad**. (DN)

... liknar situationen med slutet av 1980-talet då köpfest rådde och ekonomin till sist drabbades av **överhettning**. (DN)

PHYSICS – A SOURCE FOR METAPHORS IN ECONOMIC TEXTS

Another observation one should make is that within the economic register there is a large group of metaphors that are borrowed from

physics. This can well be explained by the well-established position of physics among other branches of science. Relatively new developing branches of science appear to borrow terminology from the more established ones, those with generally accepted methodologies. Some economic concepts are thus treated as physical objects. They can move, exert pressure or have a certain weight. The Vehicle-terms that appear as examples here include 'pressure', 'weight', 'burden' and the verb 'to melt':

Är det så ökar **trycket** på Investor att snabbt komma fram till en ny lösning (DN)

... bland de värst drabbade fanns bankerna där de stigande räntorna **pressade** aktiekurserna ... (DN)

Foxindex är **vägt** efter fondernas förmögenhet vilket innebär att avkastningen i stora fonder **väger** tyngre än avkastningen i små fonder. (DN)

... Renault köpt in sig **skuldyngda** Nissan ... (GP)

Det var AstraZeneca som fortsatte att falla och **drog ned** index. (DN)

... lastvagnstillverkare kommer att **smälta ihop** till fem om fem år. (DN)

METAPHOR AND OTHER FIGURES OF SPEECH

Another figure of speech which is common not only in literature, but also in the language of business is personification. Economies, markets and companies are brought to life and receive human qualities. Companies can be, if we translate word for word, 'optimistic' or 'healthy' and they 'grow' and 'recover' after a period of sluggishness in business. Companies can 'think' and 'talk', they can also be 'strong' or 'weak', exactly like human beings and they can 'lose weight' (again a direct translation from Swedish). Indeed, a sector of the economy can even die. Some personifications happen through metaphor, others take place by metonymy, i.e. by substituting an institution for the people responsible.

Personification through metonymy:

Delvis **talat** Volvo och Scania om olika saker som ger olika slutsatser. (DN)

Samtalet mellan Posten och ASG – från början ägt av SJ – pågår löpande. (DN)

Bankerna **säger** att de **väntar** på kunderna. (GP)

Men anläggningsmaskiner är en stor sektor som passar väldigt väl in i Volvos tänkande ... (GP)

Marknadsandelen för ett sammanslaget Mercedes + Scania i Västeuropa kan studeras i grafiken härintill och är skrämmande läsning, sett med Volvoögon. (DN)

Personification by metaphor:

SKF är i grunden ett **friskt företag** ... (DN)

De asiatiska börserna **har återhämtat sig** rejält från de kraftiga rasen förra året. (DN)

Ericson **repar sig** efter svag rapport (DN)

Antalet anställda: cirka 18 000 vid årsskiftet. En **bantningsplan** har inletts. (DN)

Kalkylerna **säger** dock inget om hur pengarna ska komma till hushållen (DN)

... tjänstesektorn **växer** starkast (DN)

att bygga en **stark SKF** (DN)

en **svagare lönsamhet** (DN)

... **magrare organisationerna** som håller på att byggas upp. (GP)

Han är rädd att åkeribranschen **hinner dö** i tvinsot innan regeringen ser över reglerna för åkerinäringen. (DN)

THE FUNCTIONS OF METAPHORS IN ECONOMIC ARTICLES

When analysing metaphorical patterns in economic articles it is important to be aware of the functions those metaphors perform in the texts in which they appear.

One of the functions of metaphors in economic texts is to make economic issues and difficult terminology easier to understand especially for the layman, who is often encouraged to read the finance sections in newspapers.

Another important function of metaphors in economic articles is the hermeneutic function. Some metaphors are used to change the reader's attitude towards an economic issue, to change the perspective. Some 'military metaphors' are used in this way. It makes a difference to talk about battles in the context of competing companies. It also makes a difference to talk about 'losing weight' or making a company 'thinner' in the context of lay-offs. Here are some examples:

Wallenbegargarna har inte råd att förlora den här **bataljen**, men det är svårt att se hur de ska vinna den. (GP)

Från början ville Vattenfall **banta organisationen** med 204 tjänster. (DN)

... **magrare organisationerna** som håller på att byggas upp. (GP)

The third function of metaphors in the texts analysed is the illustrative function, which is connected with the functions of journalistic texts in general. Metaphors are often meant to contribute to the style of the articles, especially when they are used in headlines, where they are to attract the reader. Articles often become more lively and appealing thanks to the interesting metaphors used.

Last but not least some of the metaphors we come across in economic articles were created to fill in gaps in vocabulary. At some point in the development of economics, new words were needed to name new phenomena and metaphors were handy devices to use. This is when metaphors that are most lexicalised today were coined. These include the following Swedish metaphors:

konsument, moderbolag, dotterbolag, tillväxt, affärskedja, bankjätten.

These are metaphors found in any economic text and in any conversation, not necessarily economic ones. Some of the metaphors discussed in this paper are finding their way into everyday language, economics being so important in today's world. Economics is borrowing concepts from other fields while every-day language and possibly other fields are borrowing terms from economics.

Another aspect that appears to be important in the context of metaphors in the economic register is the powerful influence of the English language of business and its metaphors on other languages, including Swedish. The traces of this influence can be observed in Swedish newspapers on a daily basis.

Some of the metaphorical patterns discussed in this paper might well represent conceptual metaphors functioning in the Swedish language in general. Identifying those conceptual metaphors could be an interesting subject of further semantic research.

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