

NOUN-NOUN EUPHEMISMS IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS

Carmen Portero Muñoz
Universidad de Córdoba
flpomuc@uco.es

The aim of this article is to study the creation and use of noun-noun sequences with euphemistic purposes. A euphemism is traditionally regarded as the replacement of an unpleasant or offensive signifier by another that functions as a 'veil' thrown over the signified. To the extent that noun-noun sequences often require contextual hints or the activation of certain conceptual metaphors and/ or metonymies, they can be used as euphemistic resources to refer to specific unpleasant concepts. The study of the creation and use of noun-noun sequences will be focused on the specific context of the global financial crisis and related unpopular political facts.

Keywords: euphemism; noun-noun sequences; noun-noun compounds; metonymy; metaphor; context

LOS EUFEMISMOS BASADOS EN SECUENCIAS DE NOMBRE-NOMBRE EN LA CRISIS FINANCIERA MUNDIAL

El objeto de este artículo es estudiar la creación y el uso de secuencias nominales con un propósito eufemístico. Tradicionalmente un eufemismo se considera como el reemplazo de un significante desagradable u ofensivo por otro que funciona como un 'velo' echado sobre el significado. En la medida en que las secuencias nominales requieren muy a menudo pistas contextuales o la activación de ciertas metáforas o/y metonimias conceptuales, estas secuencias pueden ser usadas como recursos eufemísticos para referirse a conceptos desagradables específicos. El estudio de la creación y el uso de las secuencias nominales se centrará en el contexto específico de la crisis financiera mundial y los impopulares hechos políticos relacionados con ella.

Palabras clave: Eufemismo; secuencias nominales; compuestos nominales; metonimia; metáfora; contexto

1. Introduction

Noun-noun sequences have been the object of a considerable amount of research (Downing 1977; Warren 1978; Ryder 1994). The fact that cognitive processes like metaphor or metonymy are the driving force behind nominal compounds in English has also been widely investigated (Warren 1992a; Geeraerts 2002; Benczes 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b, 2009). However, less research has been conducted on the use of this specific linguistic construction for euphemistic purposes (Gradečak-Erdeljić 2005; Gradečak-Erdeljić and Milić 2011).¹ This paper seeks to provide evidence of the conjoined relevance of noun-noun sequences and cognitive mechanisms such as metonymy and metaphor in the construction of alternative expressions that are intended to present unpleasant facts under a nicer disguise. More specifically, the focus will be the language of the financial crisis emerging in the final years of the 2000s' first decade.

The paper is divided into three sections. In Section 1 the concept of euphemism will be outlined. In Section 2 noun-noun sequences will be presented as linguistic constructions that can be conveniently used with euphemistic purposes. Additionally, it will be shown that metaphor and metonymy are relevant cognitive mechanisms suitable for this same aim. The relevance of compounding and metonymic and/or metaphoric processes acting simultaneously in the creation of euphemisms will be highlighted. Section 3 will present the analysis of the corpus. It will be borne out that noun-noun sequences based on metonymy and metaphor are an outstanding means to achieve the displacement effect aimed at with euphemisms by pushing to the background unpleasant aspects of the global financial crisis or by structuring specific domains in terms of other domains.

2. What is a euphemism?

Euphemism is “a lexical substitution strategy for representationally displacing topics that evoke negative affect”, its aim being to reduce “the communicative discomfort associated with a distasteful topic” (McGlone, Beck and Pfiester 2006: 261-63).

The purpose of euphemisms is twofold (Gladney and Rittenburg 2005: 30). On the one hand, they imply using a less offensive expression in place of another that may offend or suggest something unpleasant to the receiver. On the other hand, a euphemism can be used to save the speaker's face in doublespeak, that is, it can be used to deliberately disguise, distort or reverse the meaning of words, which is typical of governmental, military or corporate institutions. McGlone, Beck and Pfiester claim that in order to succeed in this task a euphemism must “not call undue attention to itself”, that is, it must act as a kind of “camouflage” (2006: 263).

Warren (1992b: 132-33) points out four main ways in which euphemisms may be constructed: (i) the word-formation devices of the language; (ii) the import of foreign words; (iii) modification of the form of the offensive word according to certain rules; and

¹ The research reported in this paper has been conducted within the framework of the project FFI 2008-04585/FILO, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. I am grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and criticisms on an earlier version of this paper. I am also indebted to Antonio Barcelona for helping me in many ways. Needless to say, any flaws are my own responsibility.

(iv) creation of a novel sense for some established word or word combination. However, as pointed out by Warren, “what is a euphemism ‘is in the eye/ear of the beholder’ and cannot strictly speaking be objectively verified, although normally of course there is consensus among language users as to what words are euphemistic” (1992b: 135).

In the subsequent pages the focus will be the creation of euphemisms by means of a word formation device, namely noun-noun compounds or sequences.²

3. The role of noun-noun sequences in creating euphemisms

3.1. The camouflage effect of noun-noun sequences

The English language is extremely generous in the use of noun-noun compounds or sequences. The high productivity of this process as well as the diversity of semantic relations that can exist between the two components within a compound and between the latter and the compound as a whole make them a “highly intriguing set of linguistic phenomena” (Benczes 2006a: 1).

A great deal of attention in the study of compounding has been devoted to trying to determine the possible semantic relations underlying the components of noun-noun compounds, which show different degrees of interpretability. The relation between the deverbal element and its complement is usually clear in the case of synthetic compounds (e.g. *car driver*) and noun-noun compounds with relational heads are also likely to be interpreted easily (e.g. *animal doctor*). However, for other noun-noun compounds an interpretation may not be easily activated. Many attempts at classification have therefore failed as some compounds imply a ‘missing link’, so that it may not be so clear how to classify them and, in many cases, it is only context that dictates how to interpret them (Adams 2001: 85). When dealing with the meaning of noun compounds, Adams declares that “a compound guarantees only the fact of a connection in some context of the referents of its components” (2001: 88). In a similar vein, Downing (1977: 830) points out that, though most compounds can be understood on the basis of one or more of a few relationships, such interpretations ignore most of the specific knowledge that makes it possible to interpret them. For example, some culture-specific knowledge is required to interpret *zebra crossing* as ‘a crossing that resembles a zebra’ rather than ‘crossing for zebras’.

This semantic obscurity that characterizes noun-noun sequences makes them likely candidates for euphemism creation. As a consequence of the need to resort to contextual information, the addressee requires time to get to the right interpretation so that the speaker saves face by creating some distance. The shock that reference to an unpleasant concept might cause is also diminished in this way.

² No particular stand will be taken here as to whether a given sequence is a compound or a phrase (see Bauer 1998).

3.2. *The role of metaphor and metonymy in the creation and interpretation of euphemistic noun-noun sequences*

3.2.1. Metaphor and metonymy and the displacement effect

Different scholars have advanced the role of metaphor and metonymy in the creation of euphemisms. McGlone, Beck and Pfiester have pointed out that the displacement associated with euphemistic units “is accomplished by avoiding direct, literal reference to an event (e.g. *he defecated, she died*) in favour of terms describing its consequences (*he relieved himself, she’s no longer with us*), related events (*he moved his bowels, she took her last breath*), metaphors (*he heeded Nature’s call, she jumped the last hurdle*), and other semantic associates of lower valence” (2006: 276). McGlone, Beck and Pfiester (2006) make reference to two relevant processes to achieve displacement. They explicitly mention metaphor and also implicitly refer to metonymic processes.

Traditionally, metonymy was regarded as a figure of speech. According to Koch (1999: 140), the earliest definition of metonymy (Lat. *denominatio*) as a rhetorical trope is to be found in the *Rethorica ad Herennium*, where it is defined as “a trope that takes its expression from *near and close* things and by which we can comprehend a thing that is not denominated by its proper word” (translation and emphasis by Koch 1999: 141). However, cognitive linguists have pointed out that metonymy is not simply a matter of linguistic substitution but an elaborate mental operation and they have provided their own definition of metonymy as a “cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle [or source], provides mental access to another conceptual entity, the target, within the same domain, or I(dealized) C(ognitive) M(odel)” (Kövecses and Radden 1998: 39). On the other hand, a metaphor has been defined as a set of correspondences between two conceptual domains where one of the domains (the source) helps us to structure, understand and reason about the other (the target) (Lakoff 1993: 206-07).

In the standard cognitive-linguistic conception of metaphor and metonymy (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1987; Lakoff and Turner 1989; Croft 1993/2002; Kövecses and Radden 1998) metonymy is distinguished from metaphor in terms of the contiguity-similarity distinction, among other criteria: metonymy is a matter of contiguity between source and target items, whereas metaphor is a matter of similarity between them.

The notion of contiguity of concepts in metonymy is itself metaphorical since spatial contiguity is used to refer to conceptual contiguity, that is, the existence of any salient and easily accessed association between the source and the target item. Additionally, the conceptual contiguity of metonymic relations must be a privileged pragmatic connection between source and target, that is, the source activates the target as a result of the experiential link (‘pragmatic function link’) between the roles each of them performs in the same functional domain (e.g. CAUSE-EFFECT, AGENT-ACTION, AUTHOR-WORK, and the like) (Barcelona 2011: 14). These pragmatic links correspond to Kövecses and Radden’s “metonymy-producing relationships” (Kövecses and Radden 1998: 48-61).

Kövecses and Radden (1998) and Radden and Kövecses (1999) suggest that the type of conceptual relationships which may give rise to metonymy may be subsumed under two general, high level conceptual configurations. On the one hand, the conceptual configuration *Whole ICM* and its parts may lead to metonymies in which we access a part of an ICM via its whole or a whole ICM via one of its parts. On the other hand, the

conceptual configuration *Parts of an ICM* may lead to metonymies in which we access a part via another part of the same ICM.

These types of relationship can be used to achieve displacement and some of them are preferred routes for euphemism creation. For example, when using the expression *Where can I wash my hands?* or *I'm going to the bathroom*, specific parts of the whole event, a subsequent part (washing one's hands) and an initial part (reaching the place), respectively, stand for the whole event of urinating. Since a complex event may involve several distinct sub-events, a specific sub-event may stand for the whole scenario and, conversely, a whole event may metonymically stand for an "active-zone" sub-event (Langacker 1999: 62-67). On the other hand, in some cases some conceptual elements that function as parts within whole events stand for other conceptual elements.

Kövecses and Radden (1998: 69-72) claim that there are a number of cognitive and communicative principles that seem to contribute to determining the default selection of a metonymic vehicle (i.e. source). For example, human experience determines the cognitive principles 'human' over 'non-human' or 'concrete' over 'abstract'; perceptual selectivity determines the cognitive principles 'immediate' over 'non-immediate', 'more' over 'less' or 'specific' over 'generic'. Culture-specific preference principles like central over peripheral may also lead to the selection of a metonymic vehicle. Additionally, at least two communicative principles seem to contribute to the selection of specific metonymic relations. For example, the principle of clarity states that communicative clarity is preferred over non-clarity since we have to facilitate access to the target entity by communicating our intention in a clear way. Finally, the principle of relevance gives priority to what is situationally more relevant.

In their view, these principles may be overridden for social, communicative or aesthetic reasons. More specifically, they cite the creation of euphemisms as one of the social and communicative reasons that may trigger the violation of some of these principles: in the use of metonymy-based euphemisms the cognitive principles of clarity (CLEAR OVER LESS CLEAR) and relevance (CENTRAL OVER PERIPHERAL) are violated. For example, the euphemistic word *redundancy* focuses on a precondition of the 'dismissal ICM'. The intended target is, therefore, not clearly accessible, so the metonymy also violates the communicative principle of clarity. In doing so, the intended camouflage effect of euphemisms is achieved.

Metaphor and metonymy are also traditionally distinguished in terms of the number of domains involved. Thus, Lakoff and Turner (1989: 103-104) see metonymy as a conventionalized conceptual mapping where only *one* domain is involved, whereas in metaphor a source domain is partially mapped onto a target domain, with a set of correspondences between the source and the target.

As an additional difference, Croft (1993) uses the notion of *domain highlighting* of metonymic relations to distinguish them from the *domain mapping* taking place in metaphors. The term mapping can be understood as the projection of the structure of one domain onto another, so that the projected structure imposes (some of) its internal elements and properties onto their counterparts in the other domain. Thus, in the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, the beginning of the journey maps onto that of life, the obstacles in the journey onto life's difficulties, etc. On the other hand, domain highlighting consists in the mental activation of a certain (sub) domain, the target, by another (sub)domain, the source, within the same domain matrix. For example, in *Proust is tough to read*, the subject NP highlights the secondary sub-domain of Proust's literary work within the domain matrix for Proust.

In Barcelona's view, this 'intra-domain' activation of one (sub)domain by another is an essential ingredient of metonymy, which is therefore characterized by an asymmetrical mapping, since "the metonymic source projects its conceptual structure onto that of the target, not by means of a systematic matching of counterparts [as in metaphor], but by conceptually *foregrounding* the source and by *backgrounding* the target" (Barcelona 2002: 226; emphasis original) or "by imposing a conceptual (and linguistic) *perspective* from which the target is activated" (Barcelona 2011: 13; emphasis original).

The intra-domain contiguity between concepts in a metonymic relation makes this process a perfect candidate for euphemism creation since it makes it possible for the user to push to the background specific unpleasant aspects of a particular domain (the target), while foregrounding other aspects (the source). This displacement implies low processing effort from the part of the addressee, who will be able to access the target easily, though not immediately, since no distance must be bridged between two different domains. As Brdar-Szabó and Brdar point out, "metonymy is an efficient way of saying two things for the price of one, i.e. two concepts are activated while only one is explicitly mentioned" (2011: 236). For example, if someone uses the expression *go to the bathroom* for *urinate* the hearer will have no difficulty in accessing the target, as reaching a destination is the initial sub-event for the subsequent target-event (urinating), that is, the source and the target are pragmatically associated. However, for a non-native speaker of English it might be more difficult to interpret *I need to spend a penny* ('to use a public lavatory') since spending a penny is no longer associated, i.e. contiguous with the target (it refers to the former use of coin operated locks on public toilets). If *water the garden* is used as a euphemistic version of *urinate*, the target event is hidden by comparing it to an event belonging to a different experiential domain on the basis of similarity (that is, a metaphorical relation), which might hinder comprehension.

However, some scholars acknowledge that the notions of contiguity and similarity are slippery and that there are not clear dividing lines between both (Barnden 2010). Furthermore, the distinction between metonymy and metaphor is blurred for a number of reasons, such as the lack of clear-cut boundaries of cognitive domains, the double interpretation of some expressions as metaphoric and metonymic, the metonymic basis of many metaphors and, conversely, the metaphoric basis of many metonymies, and the possible patterns of interaction between both processes (in this connection see, for example, Geeraerts 2002; Goossens 2002/1990; Ruiz de Mendoza and Díez Velasco 2002; Benczes 2006b; Barcelona 2011). As a consequence of the lack of a clear-cut distinction between metaphor and metonymy, some authors have suggested the possibility of prototype-based definitions of these processes (Peirsman and Geeraerts 2006; Barnden 2010; Barcelona 2011). Be that as it may, both metonymic and metaphoric processes will be shown to be useful tools for euphemistic creation, either in isolation or in conjunction.

3.2.2. The use of metaphor and metonymy in the creation of noun-noun sequences

There is an additional aspect of metaphoric and metonymic processes concerning their use with euphemistic purposes. Interestingly, metaphor and metonymy serve as the basis of many of the noun-noun sequences mentioned in Section 2.1. Benczes (2005a, 2005b, 2006b) has studied the different kinds of metaphor and metonymy-based compounds using the cognitive linguistics framework. The constructional schema for forming noun-noun compounds in English contains a component structure and a composite structure. These

structures are linked by correspondences which specify how the components are integrated to form the composite structure. In a typical construction one component is schematic with respect to the composite structure as a whole and the composite structure is more specific with regards to the thing that it profiles. For example, *jar lid* is more specific than *lid*. In this case, *lid* functions as the profile determinant, as this is the constituent that construes the same scene as the composite structure, and *jar* is the modifier element.

In Benczes' view "there is an inventory of metaphor and metonymy-based compounds, depending on where metaphor or metonymy acts upon the construction: the modifier, the profile determinant (that is, the head), the relation between the two constituents of the compound, or the compound as a whole" (Benczes 2005a: 181). For example, compounds like *Macarena page* illustrate a metaphor-based semantic relationship between the constituents of the compound, as a web page is like the Macarena dance, and a metonymy-based modifier, since *Macarena* stands for any fashion that has a short life expectancy but enjoys large popularity. In a different group of compounds, like *hammerhead*, it is the profile determinant that is based on metonymy, while the semantic relationship between the constituents of the compound is metaphor-based.

These examples reveal that the interpretation of noun-noun compounds may need the activation of certain conceptual metaphors and/ or metonymies, and provide evidence for the existence of a variety of patterns of interaction between metaphoric and metonymic processes, as mentioned in Section 2.2.1. Benczes (2006b) concludes that it is not always easy to work out the way in which these processes interact with each other and that the most relevant factor for the understanding of a compound's meaning is not the sequence of the extensions, i.e. whether the metaphors come from the metonymies, or vice versa, but the fact that we can rely on a number of 'interpretation routes'.

Many noun-noun sequences can be regarded as euphemistic resources since part of the intended meaning is covert, very often requiring contextual hints. As both metaphoric and metonymic processes as well as noun-noun sequences can be used with the same purpose, it is not surprising that they are very likely candidates for euphemism creation when they operate conjointly.

As an example of the role of metaphor in the creation of a euphemistic noun-noun sequence, Benczes (2009) cites *muffin top*, which was coined to denote 'the roll of spare flesh which cascades over the top of low-slung jeans'. In Benczes' view, the physical resemblance between a muffin (specifically, the pastry that is above the rim of the paper cup) and the waistline of a person wearing tight jeans motivates an image metaphor (PEOPLE ARE FOOD). Additionally, this sequence can also be based on the conceptual metonymy CAUSE FOR EFFECT since the cause of the spare flesh is probably the excessive amount of muffin eaten.

Gradečak-Erdeljić (2005: 296-97) provides other noun-noun sequences as examples of the role of metonymy in the creation of euphemisms. Thus, in Gradečak-Erdeljić's view, in *air support* a part of a scenario –support from the air– stands for the actual act of the destruction of the target on the ground. In this way, a non-violent part of the event is mentioned instead, achieving euphemism. Similarly, *body count* illustrates a PART FOR PART metonymy and a PART FOR WHOLE metonymy which operates at a second level and where the focused body counting stands for the whole target domain of the number of people killed (Gradečak-Erdeljić 2005; Gradečak-Erdeljić and Goran Milić 2011). For Gradečak-Erdeljić, "one of the most ubiquitous metonymies in the context of euphemisms is PART OF THE SCENARIO-FOR-THE WHOLE SCENARIO, . . . where it serves as a vehicle to accessing the target concept via some narrowed or semantically bleached content" (2005: 298).

4. The use of noun-noun sequences with euphemistic purposes in the global financial crisis

In Section 2.1 noun-noun sequences were presented as contextual devices in the sense that resorting to context is very often required for their correct interpretation. On the other hand, context is also a conditioning factor for the use or creation of noun-noun sequences and, more specifically, of euphemistic ones.

This fact has been noted by different scholars. For example, Benzces has pointed out that “the political environment often induces the coinage of euphemisms” (2009: 4). Benzces gives *freedom fries* as an example of the way in which the social context may affect the construal of a situation. According to Benzces (2006a: 6, 2009: 4-5), this sequence was coined by two Republican Representatives in 2003 as an alternative to *French fries* on the menus of the restaurants and snack bars run by the House of Representatives. This action was intended as a “symbolic effort to express displeasure with France’s ‘continued refusal to stand with their US allies’” as regards invading Iraq (Robert W. Ney, quoted by Benzces 2006a from Wikipedia).

Gradečak-Erdeljić (2005: 287) has also made reference to the use of euphemisms in politics and sees the metonymy PART FOR WHOLE as a useful tool to achieve this aim since “this specific metonymy (re)directs the attention of the receiver of the communicated message towards the more marginal aspects of the scenario which represents certain [sic] political situation”.

The global financial crisis is a good example of how context, more specifically, the political context, can trigger the creation of euphemisms. For example, it has spawned noun-noun sequences which government and private organizations find convenient to use as a way to protect themselves from embarrassment or legal action.

4.1. Methodology

In order to study the use of noun-noun sequences in the creation of euphemisms, a search was conducted of noun-noun sequences that were deemed as euphemistic in a canonical source of such expressions (Holder 2003). In addition to this, and with a view to collecting new formations, the specific section on business of the Internet edition of *The New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com>) (henceforth NYT) as well as the web page <http://www.wordspy.com> and a number of other pages on the web were used. A list of all the examples with the source where they were found is included in the Appendix.

The different examples were then classified according to the specific topic that they were used to refer to euphemistically. Subsequently, a classification was made in terms of the conceptual relationships used to achieve displacement, with special focus on metonymic relations by means of which different unpleasant topics are backgrounded. The reason the examples in the different topic groups are primarily classified on the basis of the metonymic relationship instantiated is that most of the examples attested turned out to be cases of metonymy. No claim is made, however, on the prevalence of metonymic processes over metaphoric ones, for which further –statistically based– evidence would be required. The analysis carried out follows the standard conception of metaphor and metonymy (see Section 2.2.1). The different metonymic groups are complemented with cases based on metaphoric mapping. Finally, use is made of the proposals by Benzces

(2006b) for some issues arising from the analysis, such as the interaction of metonymic and metaphoric processes, though these are only touched on in passing.

4.2. Corpus analysis

4.2.1. Unemployment and dismissal

4.2.1.1. Unemployment

One of the main effects of the crisis, unemployment, is the source of numerous euphemistic sequences created to avoid using this word.

EFFECT FOR CAUSE

Many of the examples from the business section of *NYT*, though not clearly euphemistic in some cases, can be regarded as alternative 'softer' expressions to avoid mentioning an 'ugly' word (*unemployment*): *employment situation*, *employment crisis*, *employment problems*, *employment gap*, *employment needs*, or *labor-market weakness*.

In *employment situation* there is not even a hint of the intended meaning since, were it not for the co-text or people's shared knowledge of the global financial crisis, no specific positive or negative situation is mentioned.

The second noun in most of the remaining sequences (*crisis*, *problems*, *gap*, *needs*), though having a certain negative semantic load, might be regarded as a more neutral substitute of the negative prefix *un-*, which avoids the explicit mention of an unpleasant fact: the lack of employment. Thus, *employment crisis* refers to the 'unemployment crisis' without mentioning it, *employment problems* should be interpreted as 'unemployment problems', *employment gap* refers to 'a gap caused by lack of employment', and in *employment needs* unemployment is not named, though the first noun (henceforth N_1) refers to something of which there is a lack. The covert semantic relation in all these sequences is therefore not locative, as they are not to be interpreted as 'crisis, problems or needs at work' but as 'crisis or problems resulting from the lack of employment' (N_2 is caused by lack of N_1). Therefore, these cases can be regarded as based on the metonymy EFFECT FOR CAUSE as unemployment is the cause of the employment crisis, problems and the like; that is, the whole conceptual construct 'employment crisis, problem, etc.' stands for 'being unemployed'.³ *Labor-market weakness* is also based on the metonymy EFFECT FOR CAUSE, though the underlying relation is ' N_2 is a property of N_1 ', that is, 'labor market is weak' as a result of the lack of employment.

The camouflage effect is enhanced in cases like *job flexibility*, which avoids mentioning a negative feature, specifically the lack of job security or stable employment by making reference to an apparently positive feature instead ('the job is flexible' for 'the job is non-stable'). At the same time this positive property might be regarded as a consequence of the former feature: an unavoidable positive consequence of job non-stability is job flexibility.

³ See Panther and Thornburg (2000) for a study of the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy.

4.2.1.2. Dismissal

The previous sequences are all used to refer to an unpleasant situation: the lack of employment. Euphemistic alternatives are also found to refer to the act of dismissal rather than its resulting state. As Holder (2003: 211) points out, “Mindful of public criticism or possible court proceedings, employers are selective in their language when announcing the dismissal either of a large number of staff or of a single senior employee . . . No euphemism is needed when the firm is recruiting”.

ACTION FOR RESULT

A set of noun-noun sequences used to refer to the dismissal act have a metonymic base. For example, *payroll adjustment* refers to the “summary dismissal of staff”, “not merely correcting an error in a previous computation” (Holder 2003: 293). Likewise, *headcount management*, *headcount realignment* and *personnel realignment* mean ‘dismissing staff’. Consequently, these sequences are all based on the metonymy ACTION FOR RESULT, since the number of employees will be reduced as a result of the processes of adjustment, management or realignment, which avoids mentioning an unpleasant fact. Also based on this metonymy are *resource action*, which remains vague as to whether people will be fired or paper usage will be reduced, *resource reallocation*, *contract extension decline*, *personnel surplus reduction*, *workforce rationalization*, *staff release* and *workforce imbalance correction*.⁴

RESULT FOR ACTION

Conversely, some euphemistic noun-noun sequences used for dismissal are based on the metonymy RESULT FOR ACTION. For example, *career change* (“dismissal from employment”, Holder 2003: 113) or *career change opportunity* both refer to an unlikely effect of the dismissal act, instead of referring to the action of being laid off. There are numerous examples similar to the previous ones, in which displacement is achieved by using contiguous concepts to refer to other concepts within the same conceptual domain. Thus, the metonymy RESULT FOR ACTION is also the base of the noun-noun sequence *headcount reduction*. *Headcount reduction* is used to refer to a dismissal of employees, “not reducing the number of times you count them” (Holder 2003: 211). An immediate consequence of people being dismissed is headcount reduction. Likewise, the sequences *career alternative enhancement*, *career transition*, *early retirement opportunity*, *duties relief* refer to the act of dismissal by mentioning positive results of the action.

⁴ It should be noted that some of these nouns, such as *adjustment*, *realignment*, *reduction*, *release* or *correction* are taken to mean ‘the process of adjusting, realigning, reducing, releasing or correcting’ here. However, these nouns can also designate the corresponding resulting states of these processes, in which case the metonymy at work would be the converse one, i.e. RESULT FOR ACTION (cf. *headcount reduction* in the subsequent group).

4.2.2 Taxes and budget

4.2.2.1. Taxes

Taxes have such a bad reputation nowadays that new variations arise to refer to this unpleasant civic duty. It is therefore not surprising that there is a large array of terms for taxation.

Some alternative reformulations of the word *tax(es)* are *national insurance contributions*, *wealth redistribution device*, *service charge*, *user fee* or *licensing fee*.

A further euphemism for taxes is mentioned by Pinker (2007) when talking about the use of metaphor in politics. The author discusses George Lakoff's recommendations to the Left on how to come up with metaphors to support their ideology. Thus, Lakoff recommends that taxes be reframed as "membership fees' that are necessary to maintain the services and infrastructure of the society to which we belong" (2007: 246).

These euphemistic variants instantiate different types of conceptual mapping. Thus, the sequences *national insurance contributions* and *service charge* avoid the 'forbidden' word by referring to different subtypes of taxes, so that they might be seen as examples of the metonymy MEMBER OF CATEGORY FOR WHOLE CATEGORY or the SPECIES FOR GENUS metonymy. On the other hand, in *wealth redistribution device* what is at work is the EFFECT FOR CAUSE relationship, since tax exactions can have the effect of helping to redistribute wealth or, at least, this is the perspective from which the speaker wishes to talk about them. Likewise, *licensing fee*, referring to a fee paid to the government for the privilege of being licensed to do something (such as selling liquor or practicing medicine) and *user fee*, which people pay for the use of many public services and facilities, both foreground the (positive) effect of paying the tax. In contrast with the former examples, the case of *membership fees*, calls for a metaphorical interpretation whereby we see the public community as a private society where members need to contribute to its goals by paying their fees (which correspond to each citizen's taxes).

If taxation is a word to avoid, tax increase is even less desirable. Governments try to sugarcoat tax increases by never referring to these changes as 'increases'. Alternatively, the result of tax increase or more general actions leading to tax increase are mentioned:

RESULT FOR ACTION

Revenue enhancement is based on the metonymy RESULT FOR ACTION as this sequence denotes 'increases in revenues as a result of tax increase'. Similar sequences are (*fairer*) *revenue raise*, *benefit reduction* and *tax simplification* ('simpler but higher taxes').

ACTION FOR RESULT

On the other hand, *rate adjustment* and *tax reform* make reference to tax increase by using the nouns *adjustment* and *reform*, which denote more general actions resulting in tax increase.

A further tax-related issue provoking euphemistic creations is tax evasion. *Tax evasion* is defined as 'the illegal non-payment or underpayment of tax' (oxforddictionaries.com). The use of this sequence to declare what one does with taxes must therefore be avoided at all costs. A legal and hence euphemistic alternative is *tax avoidance*, which is defined as 'the

arrangement of one's financial affairs to minimize tax liability within the law' (oxforddictionary.com).

Likewise, a *tax loophole* is 'a provision in the laws governing taxation that allows people to reduce their taxes' (dictionary.reference.com). A similar sequence motivated by avoiding explicit mention of the politically incorrect sequence is *tax gap*: "The most alluring idea right now is to narrow the *tax gap*, a euphemism for cracking down on tax cheats" (NYT, 11th Feb, 2007).

Tax evasion also triggers euphemistic creations based on metonymy, like *income protection* (Holder 2003: 225), which is used to refer to 'arranging your affairs to avoid tax', that is, as a euphemistic alternative for *tax evasion*. This sequence is based on the metonymy RESULT FOR ACTION, as your income is protected as a result of your action.

A different type of fraud camouflaged by the use of a euphemistic sequence is *money laundering*, which refers to the transfer of illegally obtained money to conceal its origins and is based on the metaphor MONEY IS CLOTHING.

4.2.2.2. Budget cuts

A large number of the examples in the corpus are concerned with different measures taken by governments involving cuts in the budget. These examples clearly illustrate that temporary political circumstances may be the cause of the profuse creation of sequences which try to soften certain unpleasant facts. At the time this paper was started (the summer of 2010), different governments undertook a number of unpopular measures aimed at alleviating the crisis. One of the star measures worldwide was budget cuttings, a word that politicians and newspapers avoid mentioning.

ACTION FOR RESULT

One set of noun-noun sequences have a N₂ with more general reference than the intended meaning, which could be regarded as a violation of the cognitive principle SPECIFIC OVER GENERIC. For example, *budget plan*, *budget measure*, *budget bill*, *budget oversight*, *budget restructuring* are all used instead of the more unpleasant *budget cut*. All these noun-noun sequences use a concept of a more general level of abstraction (*plan*, *measure*, *bill* or *oversight*, *restructuring*) as an alternative to the specific unpleasant measure, plan, bill or oversight: tax increases, spending cuts, job cuts and the like.

In some of these noun-noun sequences, N₂ is based on the metonymy ACTION FOR RESULT. For example, *budget oversight* or *pension overhaul* both avoid mentioning the unpleasant consequence of the action denoted by N₂, which is made clear in the subsequent co-text in the latter case: "a pension bill that would increase the retirement age and slash benefits in Greece" (NYT 8th Jul, 2010).

RESULT FOR ACTION

In a different group of examples, reference to the result is not avoided as it is made explicit by N₂. Thus, *budget bonanza* makes reference to the positive expected result instead of referring to the actions to be done to the budget: cuttings. Therefore, N₂ can be regarded as based on the metonymy RESULT FOR ACTION.

A further example that avoids mentioning 'cuttings' is the use of *budget savings* for 'budget cuts', a sequence not very convincingly analysed as metaphorical in the source where it was found. *Budget savings* is, rather, based on metonymy, as savings is probably a

positive and expected result of budget cutting, savings being defined as 'money saved, especially through a bank or official scheme' (www.wordreference.com), in this case, through budget cuts.

In a different group of examples, although N₁ has a certain negative semantic load, the combination avoids mentioning the specific unpleasant aspects of the referent overriding the cognitive principle SPECIFIC OVER GENERIC. For example, *austerity budget*, *austerity measures*, *austerity package* and *emergency budget* refer to a severe package, budget or measures of spending cuts, tax increases and salary or pension freeze. It is not uncommon to see generic combinations like these in headlines, the specific meaning of which is 'unveiled' in the subsequent co-text.

In using the above sequences, the speaker tries to postpone the harsh effect that the message may have on the listener, achieving euphemism: hearing that the government is taking some austerity measures will probably not have such a negative impact as hearing that your salary is going to be frozen or cut.

RESULT FOR ACTION

Stimulus budget or *stimulus package* are even more euphemistic, since they not only hide unpleasant facts by not being too specific but also refer to the desirable result of N₂, so that N₁ could be regarded as based on the metonymy RESULT FOR ACTION.

Also related to the government's monetary revenues is *public sector borrowing requirements*, which refers to "government overspending" (Holder 2003: 311). In this case, borrowing from the public sector is required as a consequence of the government's overspending, so that the result stands for the negative action. Consequently, this sequence is also based on the metonymy RESULT FOR ACTION.

Finally, *wage freeze*, used to refer to the fixing of wages at a particular level, (that is, a long-term wage reduction) is based on metaphor. In this case the conceptual structure of physical substances is mapped onto that of the abstract concept 'wages', to focus on the state of fixity, immovability or inalterability. The process of freezing therefore stands for a specific aspect of the process, its result (to become fixed or unalterable), so that the sequence *wage freeze* can also be seen as based on the metonymy ACTION FOR RESULT.⁵

4.2.3. Insolvency

Insolvency is a word that "must be avoided at all costs" (Holder 2003:115) and that therefore triggers several euphemistic noun-noun sequences.

EFFECT FOR CAUSE

As in the previous sets, there are sequences that refer to a negative issue at a more general level of abstraction. For example, *cash flow problem* and *liquidity crisis* both refer to insolvency. The negative though not quite specific words *problem* and *crisis* stand for the more explicit word *lack*, so that the cognitive principle SPECIFIC OVER GENERIC is violated. These sequences could also be regarded as based on the metonymy EFFECT FOR CAUSE, as N₂ is caused by the lack of liquidity. Therefore, the semantic relationship holding between

⁵ Ruiz de Mendoza and Pérez Hernández deal with similar examples to *wage freeze* as cases of "grammatical metonymy" (2001: 331-34), which refers to metonymic processes with grammatical consequences. Specifically, in *wage freeze* a verb is recategorized as a noun.

both nouns is not 'N₂ is N₁' ('the problem is cash flow') but 'N₂ is due to the lack of N₁' ('the problem is due to the lack of cash flow').

Sequences like *credit crunch* are also used to refer to the financial crisis without mentioning it. *Credit crunch* might be seen as based on the metonymy EFFECT FOR CAUSE, as it refers to the inevitable and immediate effect of the financial/ liquidity crisis.

The sequence *lipstick effect* is also based on the metonymy EFFECT FOR CAUSE. It is used to refer to 'the tendency for consumers to purchase small, comforting items such as lipstick rather than large luxury items' during a recession (www.wordspy.com), so that it refers to another effect of a liquidity/ financial crisis. The first noun in this sequence is also based on a metonymy: *lipstick* stands for the type of goods that consumers are able to purchase as a consequence of recession, and is therefore an example of the metonymy PART FOR WHOLE (MEMBER OF CATEGORY FOR WHOLE CATEGORY).

ACTION FOR RESULT

In some sequences, the reverse case is found, that is, some events stand for a negative aspect of the event. Thus, in *currency adjustment*, which Holder defines as "a devaluation" (2003: 143), the actual negative result of the adjustment process is not mentioned, so that this sequence is based on the metonymy ACTION FOR RESULT.

The willingness to avoid explicit reference to insolvency has launched the creation of some noun-noun sequences which are based on both metonymic and metaphoric processes. For example, the sequences *bank stress test* ("a test of how resilient European banks are to economic shocks", NYT 19th Jul 2010) and *bank stress* became very fashionable for a certain period of time, when banks were subjected to inspection. These sequences are based on both metaphor and metonymy. On the one hand, banks are compared with human beings with health problems so that this sequence is based on the metaphor BANKS ARE HUMAN BEINGS. On the other hand, *stress* stands for the degree of insolvency or the resilience to certain economic or market shocks, so that N₂ is based on the metonymy EFFECT FOR CAUSE (THE ILLNESS FOR ITS CAUSE), that is, the degree of bank stress is measured in terms of its lack of solvency, so that the less solvent, the more stressed the bank will be. Bank stress therefore stands for bank insolvency, so that this sequence is a conscious roundabout to avoid mentioning the word *insolvency*.

The metaphor BANKS ARE HUMAN BEINGS triggers further sequences, like *bank rescue* and *zombie banks*.

Bank rescue is used to refer to troubled asset relief measures to stabilize the financial system and make sure that banks have enough cash. Bank rescue is the consequence of a bank's lack of liquidity, so that the sequence is based on the EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy.

A further example to avoid the forbidden word is *zombie bank*, defined as 'a bank that cannot lend money because its liabilities are greater than its assets, but remains in business thanks to government support' (www.wordspy.com), that is, an insolvent bank. This sequence is based on a metaphor mapping the conceptual structure of a zombie, 'a corpse supposedly revived by witchcraft, especially in certain African and Caribbean religions' (www.wordreference.com), onto that of a bank.

Finally, the conscious avoidance of the words unemployment and insolvency is also the cause of *ninja loan*, 'a loan or mortgage given to a person who has no income, no job, and no assets' (www.wordspy.com), also found as *NINJA loan*, which results from the phrase 'No Income, No Job or Assets'. In this case, no metaphor is at work in N₁ but a metonymic process by which the salient part of a form (*NINJA*) stands for the whole

form ('no income, no job, and no assets') in an acronymic formation which at the same time stands for the person to whom the loan is granted on the basis on the metonymy SALIENT PROPERTY ('having no income, no job, and no assets') for CATEGORY ('people characterized by this property').

4.3. Summary and discussion

The analysis of the noun-noun sequences used in the global financial crisis reveals a kind of face-saving mechanism by which certain potentially harmful aspects of a scenario are camouflaged by bringing to the foreground some more general aspects (e.g. *budget plan*) or more marginal (e.g. *revenue enhancement*) or desirable ones (e.g. *career change opportunity*).

As already advanced by Gradečak-Erdeljić (2005: 1) as regards the language of politics, in all the different scenarios related to the global financial crisis, there is a marked use of the metonymy PART OF THE EVENT FOR THE WHOLE EVENT, as this metonymy pushes forward specific parts of the whole event, in this way avoiding mentioning unpleasant facts. More specifically, many of the sequences analysed are based on the metonymies RESULT FOR ACTION and EFFECT FOR CAUSE, as shown in table 1:

'unemployment'	<i>employment crisis, employment problems, employment gap, labor-market weakness</i>
'dismissal'	<i>career change, headcount reduction, career transition career change opportunity, career alternative enhancement, early retirement opportunity, duties relief</i>
'tax increase'	<i>revenue enhancement, (fairer) revenue raise, benefit reduction and tax simplification.</i>
'tax evasion'	<i>income protection</i>
'budget cuts'	<i>budget bonanza, budget savings, stimulus budget, stimulus package</i>
'insolvency'	<i>cash flow problem, liquidity crisis, credit crunch, lipstick effect</i>

Table 1. Noun-Noun sequences based on the metonymies RESULT FOR ACTION and EFFECT FOR CAUSE

Conversely, a large set of the sequences are based on the metonymy ACTION FOR RESULT, so that euphemism is achieved by quite the reverse process, focusing on a more general action rather than its unpleasant result, which is backgrounded. This is shown in the examples in table 2:

'dismissal'	<i>Payroll adjustment, headcount management, headcount realignment, personnel realignment, resource action, resource reallocation, contract extension decline, personnel surplus reduction, workforce rationalization, staff release, workforce imbalance correction.</i>
'tax increase'	<i>rate adjustment, tax reform</i>
'budget cuts'	<i>Budget plan, budget measure, budget bill, budget oversight, budget restructuring</i>

Table 2. Noun-Noun sequences based on the metonymy ACTION FOR RESULT

One might be tempted to suggest the existence of different degrees of being euphemistic. For example, sequences based on the metonymy RESULT FOR ACTION might be seen as more euphemistic than others in which the specific negative aspects of a scenario are not mentioned. Thus, *career change opportunity*, *career alternative enhancement*, *early retirement opportunity*, *duties relief*, *budget bonanza*, which focus on a positive result of the hidden unpleasant acts of dismissal or budget cuts, can be regarded as more euphemistic than other sequences such as *budget plan*, *budget measure*, *budget bill*, *budget oversight*, *budget restructuring*, which avoid mentioning the specific unpleasant aspects by using a more generic N₂ than the intended referent.

The cognitive principles CENTRAL OVER PERIPHERAL and the communicative principles of relevance and clarity are therefore overridden, with the effect of distracting the addressee from the intended target, which is the communicative and social purpose of euphemisms.

Finally, some noun-noun sequences such as *money laundering*, *wage freeze*, *bank stress*, *zombie banks* and *bank rescue* are based on metaphor (or metaphor in conjunction with metonymy).

Noun-noun sequences and, more particularly, noun-noun sequences based on metonymy and metaphor are therefore an outstanding means to achieve the displacement effect aimed at with euphemisms. Yet, what counts as euphemistic is relative or, in Warren's words, "is in the eye/ear of the beholder" (1992b: 135). While the euphemistic nature of some sequences is acknowledged by their users, the intended softening effect might be unnoticed by others.

Furthermore, the euphemistic effect of a sequence may be lost. For example, the sequence *bank rescue* is used over and over in the press and on television and was probably coined as a positive alternative to avoid reference to the cause of the rescue, i.e. insolvency. A rescue is supposed to be an expected and positive event. However, it is remarkable that this sequence is not welcomed by any country or bank. In connection with this, Pinker talks about something he calls the *euphemism treadmill* to refer to the fact that "people invent new words for emotionally charged referents, but soon the euphemism becomes tainted by association, and a new word must be found, which soon acquires its own connotations, and so on" (2002: 212). By way of illustration, he mentions *water closet*, from which we got to *toilet*, to *bathroom*, to *restroom* and to *lavatory*. Pinker observes that "The euphemism treadmill shows that concepts, not words, are primary in people's minds. Give a concept a new name, and the name becomes colored by the concept; the concept does not become freshened by the name, at least not for long" (2002: 213). Pinker's observation could be used to explain why the sequence *bank rescue* is not welcome to any bank or country's ears: rescue must have become 'colored' by the concept of insolvency.

5. Concluding remarks

In the previous pages, noun-noun sequences have been claimed to be effective resources to create euphemisms due to their intriguing nature, motivated by the wide range of possible covert semantic relations. Furthermore, the success of noun-noun sequences in creating euphemisms is enhanced by the metaphorical or metonymic nature of many noun-noun sequences, since metaphor and metonymy are cognitive processes typically used for euphemistic purposes.

More specifically, regarding the use of euphemistic noun-noun sequences to refer to unpleasant facts within the worldwide financial crisis, evidence has been provided for a marked preference to focus on peripheral parts or properties of the scenarios under analysis, so that a large number of these sequences are based on the metonymies RESULT FOR ACTION or EFFECT FOR CAUSE. Conversely, a numerous set of noun-noun sequences achieve euphemism by avoiding mentioning an unpleasant specific result of an action, so that they are based on the metonymy ACTION FOR RESULT. Finally, some sequences are based on metaphor or the interaction of both metonymic and metaphoric processes.

Works Cited

- Adams, Valerie 2001: *Complex Words in English*. Harlow: Pearson Education/Longman.
- Barcelona, Antonio 2002: 'Clarifying and Applying the Notions of Metaphor and Metonymy within Cognitive Linguistics: an Update'. René Dirven and Ralf Pörings, eds. *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast* (Cognitive Linguistics Research 20). Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 202-77.
- 2011: 'Reviewing the Properties and Prototype Structure of Metonymy'. Antonio Barcelona, Reka Benczes and Francisco José Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, eds. *Defining Metonymy in Cognitive Linguistics: Towards a Consensus View*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 7-57.
- Barnden, John A. 2010: 'Metaphor and Metonymy: Making their Connections More Slippery'. *Cognitive Linguistics* 21.1: 1-34.
- Bauer, Laurie 1998: 'When is a Sequence of two Nouns a Compound?'. *English Language and Linguistics* 2: 65-86.
- Benczes, Reka 2005a: 'Metaphor and Metonymy-Based Compounds in English: a Cognitive Linguistic Approach'. *Acta Linguistica Hungarica* 52/2.3: 173-98.
- 2005b: 'Creative Noun-Noun Compounds'. *Annual Review of Cognitive Linguistics* 3: 250-68.
- 2006a: 'Analysing Metonymical Noun-Noun Compounds: the Case of *Freedom fries*'. Réka Benczes and Szilvia Csábi, eds. *The metaphors of Sixty: Papers Presented on the Occasion of the 60th Birthday of Zoltán Kövecses*. Budapest: Eötvös Loránd University. 46-54. <<http://das.elte.hu/content/faculty/benczes/publications.html>> (Accessed 17 February, 2011)
- 2006b: *Creative Compounding in English: the Semantics of Metaphorical and Metonymical Noun-Noun Combinations*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- 2009: 'What Motivates the Production and Use of Metaphorical and Metonymical Compounds?'. Mario Brdar, Marija Omazić and Višnja Pavičić Takač, eds. *Cognitive Approaches to English. Fundamental, Methodological, Interdisciplinary and Applied Aspects*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars. 49-67. <<http://das.elte.hu/content/faculty/benczes/publications.html>> (Accessed 17 February, 2011)
- Brdar-Szabó, Rita and Mario Brdar 2011: 'What do Metonymic Chains Reveal about the Nature of Metonymy?'. Antonio Barcelona, Reka Benczes and Francisco José Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, eds. *Defining Metonymy in Cognitive Linguistics: Towards a Consensus View*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 217-48.
- Croft, William 1993/2002: 'The Role of Domains in the Interpretation of Metaphors and Metonymies'. *Cognitive Linguistics* 4.4: 335-71. (Reproduced in Dirven and Pörings, eds. *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast* (Cognitive Linguistics Research 20). Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 161-205).
- Downing, Pamela 1977: 'On the Creation and Use of English Compound Nouns'. *Language* 53.4: 810-42.
- Geeraerts, Dirk 2002: 'The Interaction of Metaphor and Metonymy in Composite Expressions'. René Dirven and Ralf Pörings, eds. *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast* (Cognitive Linguistics Research 20). Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 435-65.
- Gladney, George Albert and Terri L. Rittenburg 2005: 'Euphemistic Text Affects Attitudes, Behavior'. *Newspaper Research Journal* 26: 28-42.

- Goossens, Louis 2002/1990: 'Metaphonymy: The Interaction of Metaphor and Metonymy in Expressions for Linguistic Action'. René Dirven and Ralf Pörings, eds. *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast* (Cognitive Linguistics Research 20). Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 349-77. (Reproduced with slight changes from the paper with the same title in *Cognitive Linguistics* 1.3: 323-40).
- Gradečak-Erdeljić, Tanja 2005: 'Euphemisms in the Language of Politics or How Metonymy Opens One Door but Closes the Other'. Piotr Cap, ed. *Pragmatics Today*. Frankfurt and Main: Peter Lang. 287-99.
- Gradečak-Erdeljić, Tania and Goran Milić 2011: 'Metonymy at the Crossroads: a Case of Euphemisms and Dysphemisms'. Reka Benczes, Antonio Barcelona and Francisco José Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, eds. *Defining Metonymy in Cognitive Linguistics: towards a Consensus View*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 147-66.
- Holder, R. W. 2003: *How Not to Say What You Mean: A Dictionary of Euphemisms*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Koch, Peter 1999: 'Frame and Contiguity: On the Cognitive Bases of Metonymy and Certain Types of Word Formation'. Klaus-Uwe Panther and Günter Radden, eds. *Metonymy in Language and Thought*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 139-67.
- Kövecses, Zoltán and Günter Radden 1998: 'Metonymy: Developing a Cognitive Linguistic View'. *Cognitive Linguistics* 9.1: 37-77.
- Lakoff, George 1987: *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things. What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Chicago: U of Chicago P.
- 1993: 'The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor'. Andrew Ortony, ed. *Metaphor and Thought*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 202-51.
- Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson 1980: *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: U of Chicago P.
- Lakoff, George and Mark Turner 1989: *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*. Chicago: U of Chicago P.
- Langacker, Ronald W. 1999: *Grammar and Conceptualization*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- McGlone, Matthew S., Gary Beck and Abigail Pfister 2006: 'Contamination and Camouflage in Euphemisms'. *Communication Monographs* 73: 261-82.
- Panther, Klaus-Uwe and Linda L. Thornburg 2000: 'The EFFECT FOR CAUSE Metonymy in English Grammar'. Antonio Barcelona, ed. *Metaphor and metonymy at the Crossroads*. Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 215-32.
- Peirsman, Yves and Dirk Geeraerts 2006: 'Metonymy as a Prototypical Category'. *Cognitive Linguistics* 17.3: 269-316.
- Pinker, Steven 2002: *The Blank Slate: the Modern Denial of Human Nature*. New York: Penguin.
- 2007: *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature*. New York: Penguin.
- Radden, Günter and Zoltán Kövecses 1999: 'Towards a Theory of Metonymy'. Klaus-Uwe Panther and Günter Radden, eds. *Metonymy in Language and Thought*. (Vol. 4 of Human Cognitive Processing). Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 17-60.
- Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, Francisco José and Lorena Pérez Hernández 2001: 'Metonymy and the Grammar: Motivation, Constraints and Interaction'. *Language and Communication* 21: 321-57.
- Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez, Francisco J. and Olga I. Díez Velasco 2002: 'Patterns of Conceptual Interaction'. René Dirven and Ralf Pörings, eds. *Metaphor and Metonymy in Comparison and Contrast* (Cognitive Linguistics Research 20). Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter. 489-532.
- Ryder, Mary Ellen 1994: *Ordered Chaos: the interpretation of English Noun-Noun Compounds*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P.
- Warren, Beatrice 1978: *Semantic Patterns of Noun-Noun Compounds*. (Gothenburg Studies in English 41). Gothenburg: Gothenburg UP.
- 1992a: *Sense Developments. A contrastive study of the development of slang senses and novel standard senses in English* (Stockholm Studies in English 80). Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International.
- 1992b: 'What Euphemisms Tell Us about the Interpretation of Words'. *Studia Linguistica* 46.2: 128-72.

Appendix

- austerity budget* (NYT, 28th May 2010)
austerity measures (NYT, 4th October 2010)
austerity package (NYT, 8th June 2010)
bank stress test (NYT, 19th July 2010)
bank stress (NYT, 19th July 2010)
bank rescue (NYT, 23rd March 2009)
benefit reduction (<http://www.skeptdic.com/refuge/ctlessons/ch2.pdf>)
budget bill (NYT, 14th April 2011)
budget bonanza (NYT, 24th June 2010)
budget plan
 (http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/f/federal_budget_us/index.html)
budget measure(s) (NYT, 14th April 2011)
budget oversight (NYT, 9th July 2010)
budget restructuring
 (http://www.realclearpolitics.com/2010/09/16/budget_restructuring_must_be_top_priority_for_colorado_241849.html)
career alternative enhancement
 (<http://grammar.about.com/b/2009/04/22/fifty-reasons-why-youll-never-be-told-youre-fired.htm>)
career change (Holder 2003: 113)
career change opportunity (<http://www.wordspy.com/>)
career transition
 (<http://grammar.about.com/b/2009/04/22/fifty-reasons-why-youll-never-be-told-youre-fired.htm>)
cash flow problem (Holder 2003: 115)
contract extension decline
 (<http://grammar.about.com/b/2009/04/22/fifty-reasons-why-youll-never-be-told-youre-fired.htm>)
credit crunch
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/jul/30/economicgrowth.creditcrunch>
currency adjustment (Holder 2003: 143)
duties relief
 (<http://grammar.about.com/b/2009/04/22/fifty-reasons-why-youll-never-be-told-youre-fired.htm>)
early retirement opportunity
 (<http://grammar.about.com/b/2009/04/22/fifty-reasons-why-youll-never-be-told-youre-fired.htm>)
emergency budget (NYT, 22nd June 2010)
employment crisis (NYT, 9th August 2010)
employment gap (NYT, 7th August 2009)
employment needs (NYT, 19th July 2010)
employment problems (NYT, 9th Nov 2009)
employment situation (NYT, 9th August 2010)
headcount management (Holder 2003: 211)
headcount realignment
 (<http://grammar.about.com/b/2009/04/22/fifty-reasons-why-youll-never-be-told-youre-fired.htm>)
headcount reduction (Holder 2003: 211)
housing bubble (NYT, 14th July 2008)
income protection (Holder 2003: 225)

- job flexibility* (Telegraph, 17th March 2010)
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/comment/tracycorrigan/7462265/Job-flexibility-has-helped-Britain-weather-the-recession.html>
- job market blues* (NYT, 7th Aug 2009)
- labor-market weakness* (NYT, 7th August, 2009)
- licensing fee* (<http://www.skepdic.com/refuge/ctlessons/ch2.pdf>)
- liquidity crisis* (Holder 2003: 249)
- lipstick effect* (<http://www.wordspy.com/>)
- membership fees* (Pinker 2007: 246).
- National Insurance contributions*
<http://www.financialcrisis2009.org/forum/Taxes/How-much-of-your-money-goes-to-the-tax-man-242053.htm>
- ninja loan* (<http://www.wordspy.com/>)
- payroll adjustment* (Holder 2003: 293)
- pension overhaul* (NYT, 8th July 2010)
- personnel realignment*
<http://grammar.about.com/b/2009/04/22/fifty-reasons-why-youll-never-be-told-youre-fired.htm>
- personnel surplus reduction*,
<http://grammar.about.com/b/2009/04/22/fifty-reasons-why-youll-never-be-told-youre-fired.htm>
- public sector borrowing requirements* (Holder 2003: 311)
- rate adjustment* (<http://www.skepdic.com/refuge/ctlessons/ch2.pdf>)
- resource action*
<http://www.quora.com/What-are-the-most-creative-euphemisms-for-layoffs>
- resource reallocation*
<http://www.quora.com/What-are-the-most-creative-euphemisms-for-layoffs>
- revenue enhancement* (Holder: 326, NYT 24th June 2010)
- (fairer) revenue raise*
http://blog.lib.umn.edu/cspg/smartpolitics/2009/03/what_euphemism_for_tax_increas.php
- service charge* (<http://www.skepdic.com/refuge/ctlessons/ch2.pdf>)
- staff release*
<http://grammar.about.com/b/2009/04/22/fifty-reasons-why-youll-never-be-told-youre-fired.htm>
- stimulus budget* (NYT, 24th June, 2010),
- stimulus package* (NYT, 24th June, 2010)
- tax avoidance* http://www.working-from-home-today.co.uk/avoid_tax_opportunities.html
- tax gap* (NYT, 11th Febr 2007 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2009/feb/01/tax-gap>)
- tax loophole* <http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-a-tax-loophole.htm>
- tax reform* (<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/dec2010/taxe-d18.shtml>)
- tax simplification*
<http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/finance/ianmcowie/100006922/tax-simplification-ill-believe-it-when-i-see-it/>
- wealth redistribution device* (a wealth tax)
<http://maximinlaw.wordpress.com/2010/07/21/new-article-wealth-redistribution-and-the-income-tax>
- workforce imbalance correction*
<http://grammar.about.com/b/2009/04/22/fifty-reasons-why-youll-never-be-told-youre-fired.htm>
- workforce rationalization*
<http://grammar.about.com/b/2009/04/22/fifty-reasons-why-youll-never-be-told-youre-fired.htm>

user fee

(<http://norris.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/05/11/tax-increase-not-here/>, <http://www.skepdic.com/refuge/ctlessons/ch2.pdf>)

zombie banks (<http://www.wordspy.com/>)

Received 31 May 2011

Revised version accepted 18 September 2011

Carmen Portero Muñoz is Senior Lecturer in English Grammar in the Department of English and German at the University of Córdoba. Her research interests focus on lexical and morphosyntactic issues following functional approaches. She also works on the empirical study of conceptual metonymy in grammar, discourse and sign language

Address: Departamento de Filologías Inglesa y Alemana. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Universidad de Córdoba. Plaza del Cardenal Salazar s/n. 14071 Córdoba, Spain. Tel.: +34 957 218812. Fax: +34 957 218427.