

A lexical-semantic approach to the language of CORRUPTION

Björn Hansen

According to Kurer (2003, 44) and Buchenau (2013, 3f) research on the concept of CORRUPTION can be divided into objective und subjective approaches. The first type of definitions is based on the assumption that CORRUPTION involves the objective violations of rules or laws. Subjective definitions, in contrast, focus on the perception or on how people speak about CORRUPTION (cf. Corruption perception index by Transparency International). In our paper, we will build on the observation that language is the central if not the only medium which allows for an analysis of the conceptualization of CORRUPTION through time. We will argue for a lexical semantic approach which takes into consideration not only the semantics of individual lexical items but also 'hidden' information units activated in discourse (frame semantics). Frames are schematic representations of situations involving various participants, called frame elements. Meaning consists of a network of information elements which are inferred in discourse (cf. Fillmore 1982, FrameNet). We will propose to understand CORRUPTION as a category with a radial structure in the sense of Collier & Mahon (1993) with a prototypical centre involving the following frame elements: PRINCIPAL, AGENT, CLIENT, BENEFIT FOR THE AGENT, BENEFIT FOR THE CLIENT. Apart from that, this approach to the language of CORRUPTION includes the analysis of conceptual metaphors in the sense of Lakoff & Johnson (1980) like CORRUPTION IS A DISEASE, CORRUPTION IS A MONSTER. We will show how language can draw a systemic distinction between petty and grand corruption (PETTY CORRUPTION IS THE LUBRICATION OF A MECHANISM).

We will illustrate the proposed lexical approach on the basis of a corpus of newspaper articles covering the so-called 'Našice affair' from 1934/35, one of the major cases of CORRUPTION in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Hansen & Lisov 2015). Additionally, we will provide selected data from Czech.

Bibliography

- Buchenau, Klaus (2013): „Korruption im ersten Jugoslawien (1918–1941). Eine Skizze zu Diskurs und Praxis“. In: *Südost-Forschungen* 72, 98–132.
- Collier, David & Mahon, James E. (1993): „Conceptual stretching revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis“. In: *The American Political Science Review* 87/4, 845–855.
- Fillmore, Charles F. (1982): „Frame semantics“. In: *Linguistics in the Morning Calm*, Seoul, 111–137.
- FrameNet <https://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu/fndrupal/>
- Hansen, Björn & Lisov, Maja-Aleksandra (2015) „Die historische Semantik von Korruption im ersten Jugoslawien – eine Pilotstudie zur Begriffsgeschichte“. In: *Zeitschrift für Balkanologie* 51/2, 196–214.
- Lakoff, George & Mark Johnson (1980) *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kurer, Oskar (2003) „Was ist Korruption? Der Stand der Diskussion um eine Definition von Korruption.“ In: Kurer, Oskar (Hg.) *Korruption und Governance aus interdisziplinärer Sicht*. Neustadt, 41–51.