

Hans Bickes, Tina Otten, Laura Chelsea Weymann

The Greek Financial Crisis: Discourses of Difference or Solidarity?

The so-called Greek Financial Crisis, which has been the object of close attention in the German media since the end of 2009, has caused a public debate on who should be held responsible for the decline of crisis-hit Greece, the common currency and the Eurozone. The media's enduring and controversial public discussion has lately been referred to as the *Greek bashing*. When the crisis had spread much further in 2012 and also other countries suffered from high debt, economic stagnation and unemployment, the news coverage became more moderate. This project report highlights the role of medial discourses of difference and solidarity during the crisis. Therefore, we rely on an exemplary data-set that does not only take the development of the German media's tenor on the *Greek Crisis* into consideration, but also adds an international perspective in order to compare the medial treatment of different countries involved. The study methodologically focuses on the analysis of (metaphorical) language and grammatical structures in the news coverage of the German daily newspaper *BILD*, the German magazine *SPIEGEL* as well as the international news magazines *Economist* (Great Britain) and *TIME* (USA). Therefore, the interdisciplinary approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used in order to produce insights into public discourses in sociopolitical contexts.

Deutsche Medien haben der sogenannten Griechischen Finanzkrise erhebliche Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet. Im Hinblick auf die Verantwortlichkeiten für den Niedergang Griechenlands, für die Krise des Euros und der Eurozone war die öffentliche Meinung in Deutschland gespalten. Damit einher ging eine anhaltende und kontroverse mediale Diskussion, die aufgrund des teils rüden Stils alsbald als *Greek bashing* bezeichnet wurde. Nachdem sich die Krise 2012 auf andere Mitgliedsstaaten ausdehnte und dort zu hoher Staatsverschuldung, ökonomischer Stagnation und Arbeitslosigkeit führte, nahmen Mediendiskurse (auch zu Griechenland) etwas moderatere Züge an. In unserem Projektbericht rekonstruieren wir die Rolle, die Mediendiskurse der Differenz und der Solidarität im Verlauf der Krise gespielt haben. Beispielhaft zeichnen wir diesen Prozess an Daten aus deutschen Medien nach, ergänzen diesen Blickwinkel jedoch durch eine zusätzliche, internationale Perspektive, indem wir die Ergebnisse einer vergleichenden Analyse ausgewählter Medien aus drei Ländern präsentieren. Methodologisch stützen wir uns auf Analysen (metaphorischen) Sprachgebrauchs und grammatischer Strukturen in den Berichterstattungen des deutschen Boulevardblattes *BILD* sowie der Nachrichtenmagazine *SPIEGEL* (Deutschland), *Economist* (Großbritannien) und *TIME* (USA). Wir bedienen uns des interdisziplinären Ansatzes der Kritischen Diskursanalyse (KDA), um Einsichten in öffentliche Diskurse in soziopolitischen Kontexten zu fördern.

Prof. Dr. Hans Bickes teaches German Linguistics at Leibniz University of Hanover, Germany. His research areas are language acquisition, German as a foreign or second language, language and cognition, discourse analysis.

email: hans.bickes@germanistik.uni-hannover.de

Tina Otten, M.Ed., is research assistant at the department for German language at Leibniz University of Hanover and working at her doctoral dissertation. Since 2010 she has been member in a joint research project analyzing the Greek financial crisis (Aristoteles University of Thessaloniki, Greece, and Leibniz University of Hanover, Germany). Her research interests are applied linguistics, didactics and critical discourse analysis.

email: tina.otten@germanistik.uni-hannover.de

Laura Chelsea Weymann, M.Ed., has been a member in a joint research project analyzing the Greek financial crisis (Aristoteles University of Thessaloniki, Greece, and Leibniz University of Hanover, Germany). Currently she completes her *Referendariat* (1.5 years of teaching practice).

email: LauraChelsea@gmx.de

(for all authors) Leibniz University of Hanover, Germany, Deutsches Seminar, Königsworther Platz 1 D-30167 Hannover

Keywords:

Metaphor analysis, media coverage, discourse positions, critical discourse analysis, Greek/European financial crisis, German/English press

1 Introduction

The Greek Prime Minister Papandreou marked the beginning of what is referred to as the *Greek Financial Crisis* or *Greek Debt Crisis* today by publicly revising Greece's government deficit at the end of 2009. Although it quickly became obvious that the severe crisis the Greek economy had to face was the result of both internal and external factors, the German media's news coverage was surprisingly one-sided. Many newspapers and magazines aggressively targeted the small economy of Greece, which needed to be bailed out more than once by the Eurozone countries. Slowly, the harsh tone of the media has softened to a certain extent since it is not only Greece, but also many other European countries



that are suffering from the crisis. Although Greece is still assigned a special position in terms of being responsible for triggering the crisis in the first place, it is not blamed for all of the financial turbulences anymore. Since 2012, after the crisis had spread much further, and not only Greece, but also Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Italy were deeply involved in the financial turmoil, it has been politically accepted that Europe is dealing with a global and systemic crisis and that there is a variety of interconnecting causes and effects that can all be made responsible for the crisis.

Our study is based on the tradition of *Critical Discourse Analysis* in terms of Foucault, the way it has been used and developed by Wodak, Van Dijk, Fairclough and Chilton amongst others. We want to determine whether the German media stick to their depiction of Greece and additionally contrast the German presentation of Greece and the crisis to the news coverage of other international media on that topic. Moreover, the media seem to take different positions regarding the countries (Greece, Spain, Italy) involved. The focus was mainly on online-articles which offer a great variety of easily accessible texts.¹

We would like to frame our article with two citations by Philippe Rochat, a specialist in developmental psychology from Emory University, Atlanta:

The main idea [...] is that human psychic life is predominantly determined by what we imagine others perceive of us. We exist and gauge the worth of our existence primarily through the eyes of others. More importantly, others also determine whether I am right to feel safe, in particular, safe of not being rejected by them. Feeling safe is part of the 'good life' and it is inseparable from the feeling of being affiliated. The argument I propose is that it all depends on the recognition and acknowledgment of self by others.²

If this is true for individuals it should be true for societies and members of the European community as well. Suffice it to say that the comfortable feeling of being affiliated has heavily been shaken during the financial crisis that spread over Europe since 2008. Instead of standing up for solidarity among the European countries, the German media immediately began to heavily attack small economies like Greece; the country which was confronted first with imminent insolvency.

FOCUS for example, an influential political German magazine, mounted a long-lasting media campaign in February 2010 that was characterized by strongly one-sided views and rather rash judgments, thereby prompting Greek newspapers and magazines to react (Bickes et. al. 2012). The issue's cover presented its readers with a digitally manipulated photo of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, giving everyone the finger, accompanied by the front-page headline "Betrüger in der Euro-Familie" (*Betrayers in the Euro-family*) and the associated article "2000 Jahre Niedergang. Von der

Wiege Europas zum Hinterhof Europas: Griechenlands Abstieg ist beispiellos" (*2000 years of decline. From Europe's cradle to Europe's slum area: Greece's descent is unparalleled*). On the basis of an arbitrary comparison of random characteristics of ancient and contemporary Greece, i.e. arts, architecture, education systems, politics and gastronomy, *FOCUS* concluded that the contemporary Greek culture distinctly falls behind the quality level of the antiquity in all matters and had its heyday long ago.³ In addition to the derogatory modification of Aphrodite, an important cultural symbol to the Greeks, the author's references to Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer's ideology⁴, to Oswald Spengler⁵, as well as to Islamic prophet Muhammad were especially provocative. Using metaphors of blooming and withering, the author illustrates Greece's cultural history and suggests that the supposed decline of the Greek culture is the main reason for Greece's disastrous role within the European financial system. Economic considerations of Greece's situation in a wider context of the global financial crisis as well as differentiating analyses of Greece's history before and after World War II are almost completely omitted. Instead, *FOCUS* offers basically monocausal explanations for the European financial crisis.

2 The so-called *Greek bashing* in phase I

Following this first article about Greece's supposed cultural decline, *FOCUS* published numerous issues and articles that also revealed strongly one-sided tendencies, increasingly partisan analyses and a discriminatory, to some extent even racist, use of language. One may believe that, with such an approach to the topic, the magazine was ploughing a lone furrow. However, since the beginning of 2010, the German press in general has been involved in a heated and controversial public discussion of the *Greek Financial Crisis* that often went along with a hostile and offensive media coverage. This phase of the so-called *Greek bashing* lasted for about two years.

In our analysis of this phase we rely on data published on the websites of the high-circulation tabloid newspaper *BILD* (over 182 million visits of the website each month (IVW 2014)) and draw on exemplary reactions of the left-wing newspaper *taz*. In order to elicit discourse positions during the period of the *Greek bashing* (phase I), different quantitative and qualitative lexical approaches as well as van Leeuwen's *Social Actor Theory* (2002) served as instruments for our analysis. The lexical approach focused on the categories of nouns (esp. compound words and neologisms), verbs and adjectives in order to reveal how the media used a certain language to represent the social actors in the crisis. In addition, grammatical structures were taken into consideration by drawing on the *Social Actor Theory*. Semantic roles and causal relations that play an important role in the (ideologically coloured?) construction of social reality can be created with the use of grammar: "[Grammar] enables human beings to build a mental picture of



reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them.” (Halliday, cit.van Leeuwen 2009, p. 279). These methods of discourse analysis that were developed in the context of Critical Discourse Analysis were applied to a corpus of 242 newspaper articles.⁶ The aim was to reveal linguistic strategies for the construction of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’. Some of the results shall be covered below.⁷

2.1 The construction of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ in *BILD*

The *BILD* in particular, Europe’s largest daily newspaper, published numerous reports that implicitly and explicitly promoted the stereotype of the lazy Greeks in comparison to the hard-working Germans and tended to construct a lasting negative image of Greece in such a way as to set their German readers against financial aids for debt-laden Greece. The analyses revealed that *BILD.de* tended to use more negative connotative words to refer to the social actor Greece (13% of 846 items within the category) than *taz.de* (1% of 711 items). Newly invented words such as “Defizit-Sünder” (*deficit-sinners*) or “Euro-Betrüger” (*Euro-deceivers*) play an important role in the construction of difference. As an example, the neologism “Pleite-Griechen” (*bankrupt-Greeks*) was highly frequently used for many months and quickly became a regular name for the Greek population within *BILD.de*’s news coverage. In consequence, other newspapers began to use this new term and ultimately, it could be read and heard in user comments, public letters and everyday conversation (as it is indicated by almost 4 million entries when searching for “Pleite-Griechen” using *Google* in June 2012). With lexemes such as “Schulden-Europameister” (*European champion of debts*) as well as “Europas schwarzes Schaf” (*Europe’s black sheep*), *BILD.de* evoked connotations of Greece being an aberration within the Eurozone that compromises the European community and its currency (*What is coming up for us? Are the bankrupt-Greeks tearing down all of Europe?*). Such (metaphorical) language within *BILD.de*’s media coverage negatively represents Greece as the ‘cheater’ who abuses the system and causes danger for the other EU-members, whereas the other Eurozone countries are most often positively represented, e.g. as a family-like unit.

By contrast, 260 items used by *BILD.de* to refer to Germany and its citizens connoted either a neutral or a positive image. The lexemes, e.g. “das Mutterland der Stabilität” (*country of stability’s origin*), often refer to the wealth, economic power and industrial strength of Germany. However, Germany’s strong economic position is interpreted as a disadvantage: *BILD.de* was early to compose an image of Germany as the ‘Melkesel Europas’ (*European cow for milking*) and the “Zahlmeister Europas” (*paymaster of Europe*), thereby criticizing the fact that Germany has to carry a proportionally larger share of the rescue package (*Once again, we are Europe’s idiots! It is unbelievable!*⁸). The tendency to contrast ‘us Germans’ to ‘the Greeks’ also becomes

obvious in the so-called “biggest cheque of all times”, uploaded by *BILD.de* on their website: “wir Steuerzahler-Deppen” (*we taxpayer-idiots*) have to account for “die Schuldenhallodris in Athen” (*the debt-rogues in Athens*). Phrases including personal pronouns like “wir Deutsche” (*we Germans*) could be found twice as often in texts taken from *BILD.de* (32% of 260 items) as in those taken from *taz.de* (11% of 218 items). Such so-called collectivisations serve to express unity and affinity within the collective. In consequence, readers of *BILD.de* will gain the impression of being addressed personally. In terms of grammatical structures, these examples reveal *BILD.de*’s tendency to assimilate social actors, i.e. represent them as groups (cf. van Leeuwen 2002, p. 282). Such generic references promote the development and stabilisation of cultural stereotypes, which is why the number of collectivising structures within the articles of *BILD.de* must be considered as alarming. The representation of social actors as unspecific and anonymous groups evokes the impression that ‘they’ are all the same so that distance to the individual is created.

We want to draw on one further example in order to illustrate the strategies of constructing ‘Self’ and ‘Other’. On the occasion of the Greek Prime Minister’s visit to Germany, *BILD.de* published a public letter that dealt with the topic of Germany being *completely different* from Greece:

“Dear Mr. Prime Minister, when you read these lines you have entered a country that is completely different from yours. You are in Germany. [...] Here, the people work until the age of 67. [...] Nobody has to pay thousands of Euros to bribe. [...] Germany is in debt, too – but we are able to pay up. Because we get up very early in the morning and work all day [...]”⁹

Following the argumentation of *BILD.de*, the German population is characterized by being hardworking, honest, economical, correct with bureaucratic issues and successful in trade as well as economy. By contrast, the Greeks are described as invariably corrupt and dishonest. Numerous national stereotypes are explicitly and implicitly revived and cast a poor light on the Greeks in comparison to the Germans. With such an argumentation, an unfavourable attitude of the readers towards financial aids for Greece is promoted. With increasing frequency, *BILD.de* brings up the contrast between Germany, the ideal country with its honest and hard-working citizens, and Greece, the country characterized by *coterie, corruption and family ties*¹⁰, a land where seemingly no one has to work, but is able to live an decadent life at the cost of the other European states. As a consequence, *BILD.de* promotes a feeling of injustice in the German readers: *Why do we have to pay the Greek’s luxurious pensions? [...] And many ask themselves: Why should we pay for the opulent pension system of the Greeks?*¹¹



2.2 Consequences of *BILD*'s campaign-like media coverage

BILD.de's news coverage was – all positive and neutral exceptions left aside – like a campaign. Taking account of further qualitative and quantitative analyses, the following argumentative tendencies could be determined within *BILD.de*'s news coverage: Supported by the use of explicit statements, but also implicit metaphorical language, lexical semantics and grammatical structures, *BILD* follows principles of sensationalism and populism that lay emphasis on the construction of difference. Superlatives and catchy word constructions (such as "Pleite-Griechen" (*bankrupt-Greeks*), "Schummel-Haushalt" (*fudged budget*)) serve to entertain the readership more than to inform them. The negative image of the so-called *bankrupt-Greeks* is furthered by *BILD.de*'s use of adjectives, i.e. "dreist" (*impudent*) and "meilenweit über ihre Verhältnisse lebend" (*living far beyond their means*). Moreover, *BILD.de* tends to explain the insubstantial financial sector to be a specifically Greek problem: *Since the beginning of the Athens debt crisis we know one thing: In Greece, corruption and bribery belong to the daily routine like gyros and souvlaki*¹². Accordingly, with words such as "Europas schwarzes Schaf" (*Europe's black sheep*), *BILD.de* evokes connotations of Greece being an aberration within the Eurozone. Due to so-called aggregations such as *Germans against help for Greece. The majority of the German population rejects bail-out of Greece*¹³, which follow the principle "the majority rules" (cf. van Leeuwen 2002, p. 318), members of a society tend to rely on the majority's opinion and hence to join in, which is why publishing surveys and polls is of great importance when it comes to the formation of opinion and consensus.

As a consequence of this frequent negative attribution, the exclusion of Greece seemed justified for many Germans: Why should they – the ones living under moderate and modest circumstances – have to pay for a self-induced crisis in Greece? While newspapers such as *taz* tried to prove from a pluralistic point of view that Greece is being made a scapegoat for global problems, systemic aspects of the crisis (as a global phenomenon) remained unsaid in *BILD.de*'s largely one-sided news coverage. *BILD.de* argues that Greece and its population do not want to endure the pressure to save money and initiate the accompanying cost-cutting measures, but pass it on to their partners in the Eurozone: *The bankrupt-Greeks simply refuse to take responsibility for their debt! [...] Due to that the rest of the world has to step into the breach – maybe for the next ten years!*¹⁴ Historic entanglements between Greece and Germany were largely neglected by *BILD.de*.¹⁵ Instead, several services were demanded in return for the German share of the rescue package: *Sell your islands, bankrupt-Greeks... as well as the Acropolis!*¹⁶ This suggestion prompted the Berlin newspaper *taz* to react harshly and point out the seriousness of such demands with regards

to the history of Greece and Germany during World War II:

- The current aggression of many Germans against the Greeks stands in the good old tradition of the Nazis. They also wanted to have the Acropolis.¹⁷
- The Greeks do not deserve their antiquity; Hitler was of the same opinion and declared the Germans to be the actual Greeks. This is why *BILD* also proposed the idea of Athens selling the Acropolis to the Germans. This proposal also involved some of the Greek islands. *BILD* poetized: Money for you, we get Corfu. The Greek public reaction was proportionally harsh. After all, Corfu and Greece had already experienced the charity of the German occupation.¹⁸

Historically approaching the connection between Greece and Germany, *taz.de* emphasizes the demand for more solidarity and criticizes the public spreading of prejudices: *Prejudices demand an equalization of the enemy. In the past, it was "the Russian", now Bild talks about the "bankrupt-Greeks". Social and cultural differences are neglected. It is "the Greek" who is able to afford "anything" on our expense and who burns "our beautiful Euros"*.¹⁹ Therefore, *taz.de* laid emphasis on the Greeks' trouble due to governmental failures and publicly doubted that Greece, producing the same gross domestic product as one of Germany's 16 federal states, might seriously threaten the Eurozone.

To sum up, unpromising inferences and conclusions were supported by *BILD.de* insofar as they constructed the Germans as 'Europas Deppen' (*Europe's idiots*), who were plunged into the Eurozone-crisis by the Greeks, and who have to face the impending decline of the Euro as the collaborative currency and were nevertheless asked to use their tax money to foot the bills in Greece. *BILD.de* worked with programmatically arranged catchwords and generalising headlines which bring forward and stabilize cultural stereotypes. Comparisons used to emphasize the differences between Germany and Greece suggested that life in Greece is so much better and that the Greeks are simply undiscerning. All this evoked anger towards the Greek citizens and a strong feeling of injustice for the reader, who could not understand why he is supposed to financially support a population that obviously completely lacks discernment and remorse for many years of "Schlendrian" (*casualness, jogtrot*). Therefore, *BILD.de* revived resentments that remind of National Socialist times in order to depict the Greeks as corrupt and work-shy crooks, who aim at the German taxpayers' money, so they do not have to save money themselves. All Greeks became inseparably associated with financial problems. The combination of constructing prototypes and prototypical thinking together with using historically coined terms one the one hand and emphasizing difference and otherness of the Greek population in contrast to the German one on the other hand, served the appellative function of *BILD.de*'s news coverage. How language as a social practice works can be seen in many user feedbacks



on *BILD.de*—not only in those being extremely hostile towards the Greek population, but also in those being addressed to the authors of the aforementioned articles:

“Dear Bild,

Always adding fuel to the fire, and always stirring up the hate between the Germans and the Greeks. You would think they were joking if they said that they couldn’t manage to chase the first Greeks through German cities soon. Maybe then those in the Bild headquarters would wake up!” (*Bild.de*, referring to the article “For the Greeks there is money, when will I get some?” from 19.06.2011)²⁰

3 A new tune? The media coverage on Greece, Spain and Italy in *SPIEGEL*, *TIME* and *Economist* in 2012

Further studies are directed at the more recent period of news coverage on the European financial crisis. In the meantime, the so-called *Greek crisis* has developed into a systemic European crisis, which results from structural mistakes of the single currency and is additionally intensified by market influences, speculators, the banking crisis and the global financial and economic crisis. Beside Greece, countries like Ireland, Portugal, Cyprus, Spain and Italy were strongly affected. The crisis of large economies like Spain and Italy is much more dangerous for the Eurozone than the debt burden of little Greece. The European bailout money cannot save the two big countries in case of a national bankruptcy. The focus is on the news coverage of the months May, June and July in 2012 since important events, such as the troublesome Greek election, the bailout for Cyprus and for Spanish banks, the increasing unemployment in Europe or the downgrade of many European countries by rating agency Moody’s took place during this time. In phase II we compared the news coverage of a German, a British and an American news magazine (*SPIEGEL*, *Economist* and *TIME*). The three countries are likely to present the European crisis from different angles since the degree of the respective countries’ involvement in the crisis differs. Germany shares the single currency and is one of the more powerful European countries when it comes to crisis management. In other words, Germany is directly involved in the Euro-crisis. We analysed whether the German news magazine *SPIEGEL*, which portrayed the crisis during the early period in a similar fashion as *BILD*, changed its negative tone after it became obvious that Europe and the monetary union suffer from systemic problems rather than a single country’s mismanagement. We expected a more critical and sceptical perspective from the British magazine *Economist*. Even though Great Britain is part of the European Union, it has not joined the monetary union. Moreover, the American magazine *TIME* might take on a more distant stance on the European crisis since it is not directly involved.

Therefore, we extended the *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) by Charteris-Black’s pragmatic approach to metaphor analysis (2004) as the

method for the analysis. The well-known theory supposes that human thought is formed, structured and influenced by metaphorical concepts. The structure of an easily accessible *source domain* is transferred to an abstract *target domain*. In other words, the structure of the concrete *source domain* is used to shape the vague *target domain*. It hence simplifies its understanding, highlights or hides certain aspects of the *target domain* and has a big impact on how the abstract concept is conceived. Different *source domains* suggest different perspectives on a concept.²¹ The study presented in the following only considers metaphorical concepts that could be identified at least 30 times in the corpus.

3.1 What remains the same? Continuous metaphorical structures in the media coverage

The analysis reveals that all magazines frequently use metaphors with disruptive *source domains* to describe the financial crisis. The excessive use of such metaphors indicates that the financial crisis is considered to be a serious threat to the survival of the monetary union. This has not even changed after the crisis has been going on for more than two years. Especially negative developments such as the failure of the first Greek election in May 2012 or the official statement that Spain’s banks needed to be bailed out are accompanied by the intensive use of destructive *source domains* (*fire*, *tidal waves*, *earth quakes*, *disease*, *downward movement*, etc.) which visualise the disruptive power of the crisis and the ultimate danger for Europe. See the following examples:

“And José Manuel García-Margallo, the foreign minister, has said that the European Union risks becoming like the *Titanic*, with most classes of passengers *drowning*.” (*Economist* (5.5.12): Spain’s woes - Those sinking feelings)

“Now that both Brussels and Berlin agree that — without assistance — Spain faces the possibility not only of default, but of *pulling* the entire Eurozone *down* with it, a certain openness to changing the rules appears to be emerging.” (*TIME* – 8.6.12 - Spain - Euro Crisis: Spain Inches Closer to a Bank Bailout)

The continuous expansion of the crisis seems to be most frightening. Many metaphors can be identified that imply the danger of a constantly spreading crisis: *The Financial Crisis is a Spreading Substance/ a Tidal Wave/ Fire/ a Disease*.

“Last week they broke 6%, leading many to wonder once again if Italy might be the next *domino* in the euro-zone crisis.” (*TIME* (21.6.12): Italy’s Mario Monti)

“But so far the Greek crisis has had plenty of noisy *knock-on effects*.” (*Economist* (16.6.12): Economic epidemiology)



These metaphors emphasise that not only the highly indebted nations but all European countries are endangered since the future of the monetary union is at risk. The usage of the *destruction metaphors* spreads fear which might cause the reader to quickly agree to the determined rescue measures of the government.

A closer look at the metaphor *The Financial Crisis is a Disease* reveals that even in 2012 Greece is often presented as the origin of the financial crisis. The media describes a metaphorical *virus* which originated in Greece and is now *infecting* the rest of Europe and spreading the *disease*. It is feared that a *Grexit* might trigger a series of knock-on effects which makes Greece not only the origin of Europe's financial crisis but also of the possible collapse of the single currency.

“The danger was in the possible *contagion effect* Greece might present if it outright defaulted or bolted from the union.” (*TIME* (1.5.12): Why We Should Worry About Spain's Economic Pain)

The metaphors presented above are continuously identifiable over the years and thus shape the fiscal discourse of the European crisis (Bickes et al. 2012; Weymann 2012; Schendel 2012).

3.2 A new tune? Changes in the media coverage on Greece, Spain and Italy in *SPIEGEL*, *TIME* and *Economist* in 2012 (phase II).

The comparison of the news coverage on Europe's financial crisis in 2012 (for detailed results cf. Weymann 2013) and in the early period in 2010 (cf. Schendel 2012; Bickes et al. 2011) shows that certain changes can clearly be identified. The media's tone is generally much more differentiated, less attacking and more moderate. In 2012, the populations of the indebted nations receive lots of sympathy and the articles are full of individual stories about poverty, unemployment, job search and desperation. The audience's attention is drawn to the suffering of the population after their countries have been hit by the banking crisis and economic stagnation. The citizens are thus not accused of wasting the European taxpayer's money any more but are portrayed as victims of the politicians' mistakes.

Throughout the analysis different metaphors could be found that highlight the internal dynamics of the crisis: *source domains* like a natural disaster, a virus, a downward movement, a spreading substance, a tidal wave or fire imply that the crisis has become independent. If the crisis is referred to as a *natural disaster* it seems beyond individual responsibility.

“They're treating it as if it were a *hurricane* — a *natural disaster* that no one could control and for which no one is responsible.” (*TIME* (29.5.12): The Pain in Spain: A Banking Scandal Makes the Crisis No Joke)

In line of these metaphors the crisis seems like a natural development and hence nobody, not even Greece, can be blamed for its evolvement. Consequently, the responsibility of banks, financial markets, speculators, politicians and governments is denied. The metaphor also implies a certain powerlessness of Europe's politicians and makes all political attempts to stop the crisis seem to be of minor importance.

Furthermore, new metaphorical concepts can be identified in the news coverage of 2012. The frequent usage of the *mechanism metaphor*, which could hardly be identified in 2010, marks a change in the news report. This clearly shows that the financial crisis is by now officially understood as a systemic crisis. The media metaphorically creates a reality in which the errors of the system (single currency/European Union) have to be identified and repaired.

“But after a brief rally in response to the loan package, investors are starting to question the *mechanics* of the loan—which will be *monitored* by the so-called troika *team of inspectors* from the E.U., the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund—and whether it can really solve Spain's *systemic problems*, like its shocking 24% unemployment rate and its slumping housing market.” (*TIME* (25.6.12): World)

The *mechanism metaphor* obviously indicates that not the financial troubles of a single country but the structure of the monetary union is depicted as the cause of the crisis. The *house metaphor* which describes the European Union as a *house* that is endangered to *collapse* also determines the structure of the Eurozone to be the main problem. The metaphor identifies both the *stability* of single national budgets and the *construction* of the European Union as causes of the crisis. Both metaphors are solution-oriented and suggest a long-term restructuring or the renewal of the system as a solution.

Metaphors like the *teacher/learner metaphor* intensify the formation of a hierarchically divided Europe. The financially well-off countries are metaphorically presented as *teachers* and are thus clearly superior to the indebted countries which are portrayed as *students*. The *teachers* do not only serve as a role model but also discipline the *debtor countries* that have to follow the indoctrination, accept the control of their national budgets and thus give up sovereignty to a certain extent.

“Ireland, often pointed to as a *model pupil*, has to do more because its primary deficit of 6.7% of GDP last year was considerably higher than Greece's and Portugal's.” (*Economist* (12.5.12): The threat of a Greek exit)

“I'm against this way of dealing with Greece, [which consists] in provoking the Greek public opinion and *giving advice and indications* to the Greek sovereign.



We don't have to *lecture* Greece.” (*Economist* (15.5.12): Groping towards Grexit)

This metaphorical language use establishes the picture of a divided Europe and might cause the reader to develop a condescending attitude towards the financially troubled nations (see for instance user-feedbacks in numerous online media).

Moreover, the intense usage of *war metaphors* to describe politics in Europe indicates that the European countries' interaction is bellicose, militant and rather aggressive and clearly not that of a solidly united community. While the financially stronger European countries are usually in the position to *attack*, for instance with agonising austerity measures, the highly indebted countries need to *defend* themselves. In the course of this metaphor the large economies Italy and Spain are taken more serious as they are presented as stronger *opponents* than Greece. Especially *Economist* and *TIME* emphasise that the crisis can only be beaten if Europe *combines its powers*. This is a critical hint towards Angela Merkel's refusal of mutual liability.

“Mit seinem Verbündeten möchte er eine Strategie aushecken, Druck auf Kanzlerin Merkel auszuüben: Süd gegen Nord.” (*SPIEGEL* (30.7.12): Brandstifter Nr. 1)²²

“*Unite or die*. Ultimately, as we have argued, a solution requires the currency's members to draw on their *combined strength* by mutualising some debt and standing behind their big banks.” (*Economist* (28.7.12): The flight from Spain)

3.3 The debtor countries in comparison

We additionally investigated whether the representation of the three indebted countries Greece, Spain and Italy in the media radically differs. The analysis shows that Spain and Italy are presented in a better light than Greece. While Spain and Italy are rather depicted as victims of the crisis whose situation is threatening the survival of the single currency, Greece is often portrayed as the origin of the crisis and a burden to the European nations. Despite of the fact that Greece's financial situation is the most severe, Greece receives less sympathy and solidarity than Spain. This might be an effect of the so-called *Greek bashing*, a period when the majority of the German media presented the *Greek Crisis* in a harsh and aggressive manner as being self-inflicted. It becomes obvious that even though the tone of the news coverage is generally more moderate than in 2010, the media have not completely stopped their accusations towards Greece. While the media highlight that the Spanish people cannot be blamed for their banking and housing crisis, none of the news magazines explicitly reports that the Greek population cannot be blamed for the mismanagement of their politicians either. However, Spain is perceived as a great danger for the Eurozone since Europe's financial means are not sufficient to help out a large economy like Spain in case of a bankruptcy. This is also reflected in the metaphor use of the media. Spain's

banking crisis is just as often metaphorically presented with some sort of *destructive metaphor* as the Greek plight. Italy, on the other hand, as a country that has not needed any financial help yet, is perceived less menacing. While *Economist* and *TIME* highlight the critical developments of Spain's or Greece's crisis, they do not regularly use metaphors with threatening or destructive *source domains* to describe Italy's situation. *TIME* only publishes six articles that deal with Italy's crisis in a time period of three months. This clearly shows that the editorial staff prioritises other topics. *SPIEGEL*, on the contrary, presents Italy's economic and financial problems as ultimate danger for the single currency. The German news magazine focuses on possible future scenarios: What would happen if Italy was insolvent? *SPIEGEL*'s strategy to provoke fear in the reader might be linked to Germany's role in the crisis: Due to the country's economical strength, Germany has to contribute the largest financial share out of all European countries to assist the indebted nations. To save Italy much more of the German taxpayers' money will be needed. The German worry about the crisis development in Italy is hence based on national self-interest rather than on solidarity. Moreover, Germany's economy clearly benefits from the existence of the single currency. Italy's bankruptcy would ultimately lead to the breakdown of the Eurozone since the economic size of the country is too large to be bailed out.

3.4 The discourse positions of the magazines

It is not possible to determine a certain discourse position for each news magazine as all of them cover the news on a broader scale. However, the metaphor analysis revealed some characteristic tendencies for each magazine. In general, *SPIEGEL*'s news coverage in 2012 is clearly more moderate and less provocative than in spring 2010. However, the demands for solidarity are addressing Spain much more than Greece. Although the news coverage of the German magazine transmits lots of sympathy for the Spanish population's fate, there seems to be little or no solidarity for Greece. This result shows how the period of *Greek bashing* has worsened the relationship between Greece and Germany over the years. But *SPIEGEL* also plays with the readers' fears of a looming end of the Eurozone and thus makes the crisis seem quite threatening. This might be a strategy to justify all political actions that the German government takes to solve the financial crisis. Ironically, *SPIEGEL* presents Germany and not Greece as the victim of the crisis. The German taxpayers are 'suffering' from the high cost of the rescue packages and the government around Angela Merkel is under much pressure when it comes to European crisis policies. *SPIEGEL* is eager to shift the blame for the crisis away from Germany and makes the country and its political leaders appear in a good light by assigning them heroic-like attributes. In contrast to the economically weaker countries, Germany is portrayed as a strong and flourishing nation. In consequence, the



magazine's readers might develop a priggish self-perception and a dismissive attitude towards the financially weak periphery.

The overall analysis proves that the *Economist* portrays a more negative, critical and sceptic attitude towards the single currency by frequently using threatening metaphors that make the crisis seem to be a dire hazard for Europe. The earth quake metaphor stresses the instability of the single currency and the danger of a possible disintegration of the Eurozone: *Tremors* are *splitting* and *disuniting* the European nations. The future of the common currency is portrayed with great scepticism. The magazine highlights the weaknesses and the volatility of the monetary union rather than its strength.

“*Tremors and rumbles - Earthquakes*, political and geological, have disoriented Italy” (*Economist* (23.7.12): Tremors and rumbles)

“Some contagion may be caused by markets waking up to the possibility that the Eurozone could indeed *fall apart*.” (*Economist* (16.6.12): Economic epidemiology)

In consequence, the attention is primarily focused on the risks, negative aspects, disadvantages, dangers and burdens of being a member of the monetary union. The *Economist's* sceptical attitude towards the single currency conveys the view that the basic principles of the European Union have to be questioned and not the financial troubles of one single country. Moreover, the *Economist* criticizes the European Union as well as the crisis management of the respective European politicians. Out of all the analysed magazines the *Economist* shows the most solidarity for the indebted countries and sympathy for the suffering population. The magazine highlights that the time frame to implement the austerity measures is way too small. Moreover, the *Economist* criticises the dominant, patronising and dismissive behaviour of Europe's leading politicians towards the Greek government. It critically questions the ongoing public *Grexit* debate and argues that the crisis managers only want to threaten Greece in order to enforce their personal political interests.

As pre-supposed, the metaphor usage of the magazine *TIME* suggests a more distanced perspective. This can exemplarily be shown by looking at the *game metaphor*. Presenting the crisis metaphorically as a *game* indicates that the danger of the spreading crisis is not taken seriously. The use of the metaphor makes the tone seem sneering and amused as it is making fun of the never-ending summits, the insufficient reforms, the political power *games* and the ongoing debate about who is going to pay the bill. The use of this metaphor shows the distanced American perspective on European debates. The news magazine takes the crisis less serious and makes fun about the European strategies of 'solving' the crisis.

“But that means the banks would have to take a big loss on what they've already lent Greece, and, just like

everyone else in this *game*, they're not that willing to pay.” (*TIME* (12.7.11): Will Italy Bring Down the Eurozone?)

Furthermore, *TIME* is less emotional about the question whether Europe is a community that should stick together and show solidarity. The *family metaphor*, used by *SPIEGEL* and *Economist*, stresses the fact that the European nations are a *family*, which should support each other and show solidarity, and that the euro is their *child* which needs to be protected and taken care of. The style of *TIME* is often neutral or even distanced, whereas the German and the British magazines show more emotion on the topic. Generally speaking, *TIME* lives up to the expectations: When it comes to the European community, the magazine is more distanced, neutral and less emotional. No *family metaphors* can be identified in the articles of the American magazine. Interestingly, *TIME* uses the *war metaphor* more often than the other magazines. The frequent use of *war metaphors* indicates American processes of political interaction are rather confrontational and warlike than collaborative. The *source domain war* seems to be easily accessible for the Americans and is thus used frequently in order to describe international relations and foreign affairs.

3 Conclusion

We promised to end our article with another citation by Philippe Rochat. In his book *Others in Mind* Rochat summarizes:

Modern freedom entails modern anxieties. There is pressure on individuals to define their own moral space, their own individual responsibilities, while struggling to maximize resources for self and promote themselves to others. Associated with this dynamic is a modern panic syndrome, the panic syndrome of failing. There is a generalized fear of failure, the fear of not earning enough, of not achieving goals we are compelled to assign to ourselves, not meeting expectations on the basis of what is represented to other's views on the self and other's valuation of the self. This valuation of the self to meet other's fantasized (represented) expectations is the core drama of individuals entangled in contemporary industrial life. (Rochat 2009, p. 232)

Young Europeans are confronted with a tremendous load of challenges, with the threat of financial distress, massive unemployment and unmanageable environmental problems without being responsible for any of these issues. Future generations need a strong sense of affiliation and collaboration on the European level to cope with this complex situation. Instead, influential media have created a *discourse of difference* over the last years. There seems to be an urgent need for European discourses of solidarity and not for discourses of mutual vilification and disdain. Greece became the centre of focus in the search for the cause of the crisis,



although a noteworthy percentage of these reasons should have been searched for on a global level and in an economist thinking that is established worldwide. However, recent research data on the current medial treatment of the debtor countries stirs up hope that the European media will realize a more critical, differentiating and less accusing news coverage.

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Endnotes

¹ Some ideas developed in this paper are presented with additional methodological rigor in Bickes/Otten/Weymann 2014.

² Philippe Rochat on his book *Others in Mind: Social Origins to Self-Consciousness*.

http://rorotoko.com/interview/20091125_philippe_rochat_on_others_mind_social_origins_self-consciousnes/

³ In consequence, the Greek newspaper *Eleftheros Typos* published a digitally manipulated photo of the statue of Victoria on the Berlin Victory Column which shows Victoria raising a swastika as it had been adopted as a symbol of the Nazi Party of Germany in 1920. Moreover, the Greek magazine *Focus* (not to be confused with the German magazine *FOCUS*) described contemporary German culture as still being under the influence of Adolf Hitler's spirit.

⁴ A Austrian publicist known for his controversial theories concerning the racial origins of the Greeks

⁵ A German historian who published "Der Untergang des Abendlandes" (*The decline of the West*), proposing a theory according to which civilizations have a limited lifespan and ultimately decay

⁶ 112 taken from the web page of *BILD.de*, 130 taken from the web page of the left-wing and liberal *taz*, which was chosen for the contrastive analyses due to its dissenting opinions from those being held by *BILD.de*.

⁷ For further analyses and results cf. Bickes/Butulussi/Otten/Schendel/Sdroulia/Steinhof 2012.

⁸ "Wir sind mal wieder Europas Deppen! Es ist unfassbar!" (*BILD.de*)

⁹ "Lieber Herr Ministerpräsident, wenn Sie diese Zeilen lesen, haben Sie ein Land betreten, das ganz anders ist als das Ihre. Sie sind in Deutschland. [...] Hier arbeiten die Menschen, bis sie 67 Jahre alt sind. [...] Hier muss niemand tausend Euro Schmiergeld zahlen. [...] Deutschland hat zwar auch hohe Schulen – aber wir können sie auch begleichen. Weil wir morgens ziemlich früh aufstehen und den ganzen Tag arbeiten. [...]" (*BILD.de*)

¹⁰ "Klüngel, Korruption, Familienbande. So funktioniert das System Griechenland." (*BILD.de*)

¹¹ "Warum zahlen wir den Griechen ihre Luxus-Renten? [...] Und viele fragen sich, warum sollen wir z.B. für das üppige Renten- und Pensionssystem der Griechen zahlen?" (*BILD.de*)

¹² "Seit Beginn der Athener Schuldenkrise wissen wir: In Griechenland gehören Korruption und Bestechung zum Alltag wie Gyros und Souvlaki." (*BILD.de*)

¹³ "Deutsche gegen Griechenland-Hilfe. Die Mehrheit der Deutschen lehnt die Griechen-Hilfe ab." (*BILD.de*)

¹⁴ "Die Pleite-Griechen wollen einfach nicht für ihre Schulden gerade stehen! [...] Dafür muss der Rest der Welt in die Bresche springen – und das vielleicht für die nächsten zehn Jahre!" (*BILD.de*)

¹⁵ For further details see the works on Greece's history by author Hagen Fleischer, who pays attention to aspects such as occupation, collaboration, resistance, World War II as well as transnational history of the past (published in the years 1986, 1991, 1999, 2006).



¹⁶ „Verkauft doch eure Inseln, ihr Pleite-Griechen... und die Akropolis gleich mit!“ (*BILD.de*)

¹⁷ „Die aktuelle Aggression vieler Deutscher gegen die Griechen steht in guter alter Nazitradition. Die wollten auch schon die Akropolis haben.“ (*taz.de*)

¹⁸ „Die Griechen verdienen ihre Antike gar nicht, was im Übrigen auch Hitlers Meinung war, der die Germanen als die eigentlichen Griechen proklamierte. Weshalb *Bild* auch vorschlug, die Akropolis Athens an die Deutschen zu verkaufen. Dieser Vorschlag zur Güte sollte auch einige der griechischen Inseln betreffen. *Bild* dichtete „Ihr kriegt Kohle, wir kriegen Korfu“. Entsprechend scharf war die Reaktion der griechischen Öffentlichkeit. Schließlich hatte Korfu wie ganz Griechenland schon mal die Wohltaten der deutschen Besatzung erlebt.“ (*taz.de*)

¹⁹ „Das Vorurteil benötigt die Gleichmachung des Feindes. Früher war es „der Russe“, bei *Bild* sind es jetzt die „Pleite-Griechen“. Soziale und kulturelle Unterschiede beim Vorurteilsobjekt werden getilgt. Es sind „die Griechen“, die sich auf unsere Kosten „alles“ leisten, die „unsere schönen Euros“ verbrennen.“ (*taz.de*)

²⁰ „Liebe *Bild*. Immer schön Benzin ins Feuer kippen und immer schön den Hass zwischen Deutschen und Griechen schüren. Wäre doch gelacht, wenn man [...] es nicht fertig brächte, das bald die ersten Griechen durch deutsche Städte gejagt werden. Vielleicht wird man dann in der *Bild* Zentrale aufwachen!“ (*BILD.de*, zum Artikel „Für die Griechen ist Geld da, wann gibt's was für mich?“ vom 19.06.11)

²¹ For further details: Lakoff/Johnson (1980).

²² *He [Rajoy] wants to concoct a strategy with his ally [Monti] to put pressure on chancellor Merkel: south against north.*

