INTERCULTURAL METAPHORS IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN

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Abstract: The purpose of this research is to explore and compare intercultural metaphors found in Romanian and British business press. The framework of analysis includes both a pragma-linguistic approach, and the cognitive metaphor theory, as well as anthropological theories of cultural categories. I propose to identify the way in which metaphors reflect social and cultural realities and how they can shape mentalities, attitudes and behaviours.

The analysis is based on journalistic texts, published in various broadsheets from the business field in both English and Romanian.

The results proved that indeed there are certain culture-bound aspects that are visible in metaphoric language in both Romanian and English.

Keywords: cultural categories intercultural competence; culture-bound behavioural patterns.

Introduction

Language and culture are indissolubly interrelated. Both are the supreme expression of humans’ faculty of thinking, communication, and social living. An important tenet of our study is that culture is intrinsically interspersed with linguistic structures, as the mental lexicon of a language reveals the interrelatedness between cognition, knowledge organization and communication. (Aitchison 2003, Geertz 1973, Holland, & Quinn 1987, Jackendoff 2007, Kachru, & Kahane 1995, Palmer 1996, Wierzbicka 1992, 1997) According to Geertz, culture “denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in

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symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (1973: 89).

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values. Culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning elements of future action. Cultural conceptualisations are found in linguistic conceptualisations, and what is more, there are universal concepts that all humans share, while there exist cultural determinations which would in turn shape behaviours and communication patterns.

Moreover, metaphoric and idiomatic expressions of a given culture empower us to see how the members of that culture map out their experience of the world and record it into their native language. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980:12), “a culture may be thought of as providing, among other things, a pool of available metaphors for making sense of reality”; and “to live by a metaphor is to have your reality structured by that metaphor and to base your perceptions and actions upon that structuring of reality.”

**Literature review**

The issue of metaphors and culture has actually long been of interest for researchers, who tried to identify the ways in which language in general and culture are interrelated, and more specifically, figurative language. The cognitive concepts that are universal will constitute the starting point for different cultural variations which will also prevail in the linguistic patterns shared by a certain community of people speaking the same language. According to Kövecses (2014), this may be exemplified through the representation of the self, which is variable across different cultures. Thus (pp. 62-65), in Western societies that bring the self to the fore, the concept is comes in conjunction with a series of other concepts, including independence (personal), self-centred, self-expression, self-indulgence, personal goals and desires, happiness (personal), achievement (personal), self-interest, selfishness, suspicion, pride, competition, indifference. Along the same lines, in some Eastern societies, the notion of the self is embedded in a different network of concepts, opposite to the above: interdependence, other-centred, saving the other’s face,
self-denial, social goals and desires, happiness (social), achievement (social), interest (social), sharing, trust, humility, cooperation, care, concern.

I also base my theory on anthropological approaches to culture, such as Geert Hofstede’s cultural categories (1991) which can be seen as mirroring the above ideas, in the sense that he also characterises societies as individualistic versus collectivistic. In individualist societies the ties between people are loose, people tend to look after themselves and their immediate families, whereas in collectivistic societies, people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, cherishing family values. The other cultural categories much advocated by corporate trainers nowadays refer to power distance, masculinity vs femininity, uncertainty avoidance and log-term orientation.

Research methodology

The research hypothesis underlying this paper is that there exist identifiable ways in which metaphors are accountable for cultural differences in the Romanian and British languages, and these linguistic expressions do reflect cultural and social realities. My analysis is based on two corpora (British and Romanian), consisting of articles from general audience and financial broadsheets, written during 2012-2015, i.e.: The Economist, The Guardian, The New York Times and The Telegraph for the English corpus; and Adevârul, Jurnalul Naţional, Cotidianul, Capital, and Ziarul Financiar for the Romanian corpus.

The current research was carried out based on a concordancing tool (ConcApp) which was used in order to identify cognitive categories – as identified by Lakoff (1994) in his Index of Source domains and Metaphors (developed through the Conceptual Metaphor Home Page at http://www.lang.osaka-u.ac.jp/~sugimoto/MasterMetaphorList/index.html). I started from headwords from the target domain and I conducted manual search throughout the corpus. The methods employed were: quantitative analysis, based on statistical data starting from headwords and collocations frequently identified in the corpus; and qualitative analysis, in which I analysed the metaphors found from the perspective of universality and cultural variation.

Results and interpretation
It was unsurprisingly revealed that metaphors clustered in cognitive categories account for cultural categories, both in terms of conceptual universals and variants, resulting in a complex mapping of interrelated cross-connections (also see Popescu 2012). Metaphor in general performs a persuasive role, and a deeper insight into its structure and meaning can provide a better understanding of the culture that has originally coined it. In the following I will present a brief glimpse into the cognitive and cultural categories I identified in two corpora – one British and one Romanian. The results are rather limited for the purpose of this article, but will be further developed in subsequent work, as part of the ongoing project, Universals and Variants of English and Romanian Business Metaphors. A Corpus-Based Conceptual Mapping of Contemporary Journalese (http://business-metaphors.ro/). Apart from Lakoff’s conceptual metaphors, some other were established, which appeared with more or less frequency in the two languages, according to the cultural determinations of the two nations.

_the economy is a moving object_

1) That is because China is in the midst of two tricky transitions: from an investment-led economy to a consumption-driven one
2) the ECB’s unconventional policies over the past 18 months had been the “dominant force” in spurring the euro-zone economy
3) it could give the world economy a boost
4) a falling real may help to shift Brazil’s economy away from import-driven consumption and towards investment
5) Reformists hope the plenum will begin to steer the economy away from what might be called the Beidaihe model
6) pilots are squabbling over the controls while the economy hurtes towards disaster
7) squeeze of 5% of GDP, easily enough to push the economy into recession
8) easing fears that the world’s second-biggest economy was heading for a slump

_the economy is a body_

1) … from an economy addicted to rapidly rising credit to one that is more self-sustaining
2) credit crunch of the kind that crippled America’s economy
3) The tax does not seem to have harmed the provincial economy
4) the central bank’s actions would revive the economy
5) is still an impressive figure for a once-moribund economy
6) the deteriorating economy
7) The first is that a limping economy is struggling to provide good jobs
8) sanctions relief will not transform the ailing economy

The few occurrences in the Romanian corpus displayed a negative semantic prosody (related to an ailing body).

1) O maladie – o cerere insuficientă pentru bunuri și servicii – s-a abătut de mult timp asupra economiei mondiale
2) [Economia] Mergea foarte prost, tocmai din cauză că preferințele publicului erau amputate

The economy is a machine
1) can create the conditions for a functioning economy
2) His most urgent task is to fix the economy.
3) she has been unable to get the spending cuts and fiscal reforms needed to repair the economy

money is a liquid (Lakoff’s index)
1) as it bleeds money trying to undercut Amazon
2) the flow of money
3) has been pouring money into clean energy and other innovations
4) it will be through a combination of enormous injections of public money
5) who in turn funnelled the money to their political masters
6) The past few years have seen money slosh towards anyone in a hoodie

I found less occurrences of this conceptual metaphor in the Romanian corpus, and usually with reference to international events. However, mention should be made that there is a Romanian saying “banii curg gârlă” – the money flows in rivulets, which actually refers to squandering money,

1) Politica monetară care diluează banii este precum politica Hexi Pharma
   The monetary policy that dullutes money is like Hexi Pharma policy
2) Politica injectiilor monetare nu este în mod direct criminală
The policy of monetary injections is not overtly criminal

*investments are containers for money* (Lakoff’s index)
1) and most funds *lock in* investors’ *money* for at least five years
2) There is a ready alternative to keeping *money* in banks
3) Sasan Rahnema, an Iranian businessman who returned from America in 2005, says there are more firms in Iran worth *putting money into*

*time is money* (Lakoff’s index)
1) it will exit the physical-commodities trading business, having *spent* lots of *time* and money since the crisis
2) These negative externalities are a substantial *waste* of the recipients’ *time*; the cost of disposing of junkmail has also risen
3) The Dutch seem to believe that an excess of meetings is the biggest *devourer of time*
4) To achieve this will *take time* and a lot of money

*money is a resource*
1) to fix the presidential poll by *misusing state money*
2) will not be the last local government to *run out of money*
3) Some of the *moneysaved* could be *spent on* better detection
4) The American territory made the payment by *using money* that had been *set aside* to pay a lower class of bonds next month
5) There is plenty of *money* to be saved
6) but left the finicky work of *doling out* that *money* until now
7) But just because the *money* has been *allocated* does not mean
8) And if there is any borrowed *money* behind these firms, it is limited

In my opinion, this conceptual metaphor is far more relevant for the business landscape than *time is money*, considering that money can be spent, saved, borrowed, allocated, (mis)used, set aside, etc. The same conceptual metaphor can be found in the Romanian corpus as well, although in less occurrences.
1) *daca puneti pe hârtie directiile în care cheltuiti bani*  
   If you write down the directions in which you spend money
2) We talk about people who have lost massively on the stock exchange

3) The population saving money also loses because private pension funds are...

4) another citizen goes full of trust to borrow that money, use it and give it back

the value of money is unstable

1) In order for the buying power of the RON to change, something has to happen: either the money demand to change, or the money supply, or both.

2) If the money supply and demand remain constant, then nothing happens with the value of money

3) people are not so stupid as to accept money regardless of their value; they want money with a certain buying power

4) when the National Bank of Romania printed mercilessly, the value of money fell dramatically

5) with the same amount of money one can buy less and less goods

This cognitive metaphor which is predominantly found in the Romanian corpus reflect the cultural category Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) which refers to a society’s tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity, indicating to what extent a culture mentally programs its members to feel and act either uncomfortable or comfortable in unpredictable, unstructured situations. People in uncertainty avoiding countries are more emotional, and motivated by inner nervous energy. According to Geert Hofstede’s theory, Romania scores 90 on this dimension and therefore displays a very high preference for
avoiding uncertainty. Countries exhibiting high Uncertainty Avoidance maintain rigid codes of belief and behaviour and are intolerant of unorthodox behaviour and ideas. In such cultures there is an emotional need for rules (even if the rules never seem to work) time is money, people have an inner urge to be busy and work hard, precision and punctuality are the norm, innovation may be resisted, security is an important element in individual motivation (https://geert-hofstede.com/romania.html). Below is the chart provided by the online comparison tool available at The Hofstede Centre, https://geert-hofstede.com/.

![Fig. 1 Romania vs UK through the lens of the 6-D Model](image)

This would explain why the fluctuations in money value are a discomforting factor and represent a high risk to Romanian citizens, hence their preoccupations for this issue. In comparison, The British would display a lower UAI (35%, as per figure above), and less such metaphorical conceptualisations were found in the British corpus.

*Squandering is a sin*

1) Likewise, experience shows that inner-city schools cannot be fixed by throwing money at them

2) have been charged with crimes such as bribery and money-laundering

The examples are by far more numerous in the Romanian corpus, with a larger lexical field related to wasting money, which would also account for the fact that the Romanian culture is one based on the cult of property, the cult of the money well spent
(children are inculcated with thrifty behaviours – *bani albi pentru zile negre* – transl. white money for black days)

1) refuzul UE de a rambursa *bani cheltuiti aiurea*
   
   EU’s refusal to reimburse the money spent carelessly

2) *si aruncând în foc 20% din banii colectați prin taxe*
   
   and burning 20% of the money collected through taxes

3) În acest context este o greșeală să *spargem banii*
   
   In this context it is a mistake to (break) squander money

4) Principala cale de a *risipi banii*, pe care o observ la foarte multa lume
   
   The best way to waste money, which I notice in many people’s cases

5) ca ea este construita fix de cei care *toacă banii* publici
   
   That this is built by the very ones who (chop) squander public money

6) Daca *banii* ar fi fost *cheltuiti cu vreun folos*
   
   If the money had been used with any purpose at all

**Conclusions**

An understanding of the similarities and differences in our languages and cultures will empower us to communicate and function successfully, especially in the international business arena, will develop our intercultural competence and improve human relationships. The preliminary results of our analysis are in line with Geert Hofstede’s cultural categories framework (1997), especially in the case of uncertainty avoidance index. Romanians’ need for security and stability would account for their preoccupation with the waste of time and squandering of money. In an almost equal proportion, both cultures view money as a resource and understand the face value of it in terms of a commodity.

**References**


