A Corpus-analysis of time metaphors in British and Romanian business press

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse metaphors related to TIME from the business discourse (found in British and Romanian business press), and to identify the patterns of occurrence that are most frequent in the two corpora. The main tenet is that cognitive metaphors are instantiations of cultural categories manifested in the language spoken by the community that shares a common set of characteristics within a given cultural matrix. Our analysis is based on two corpora (British and Romanian), consisting of articles from general audience and financial broadsheets, written during 2012-2015. The newspapers used for this study are: The Economist, The Guardian, The New York Times and The Telegraph for the English corpus; and Adevarul, Jurnalul National, Cotidianul, Capital, and Ziarul Financiar for the Romanian corpus. The results were analyses both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Keywords: business metaphors; conceptualisation of time; corpus linguistics;

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1. Introduction

Economic discourse has abounded in figurative language from the beginnings of trade itself. The communicative function of metaphor in particular is self-evident in journal article titles, the financial press, headlines, marketing and advertising, etc. Another aspect is that of the interrelatedness of semantic and social change of the language, in order to reflect different historical moments, marked by social and economic transformations. However, besides its social, political and cognitive dimensions of the language used in the business domain, it also displays cultural underpinnings, pertaining to specific cultural concepts of one particular nation. Conceptualisations of culture, besides cognitive categories offer deeper insights into intercultural communication. An understanding of people's metaphorical language can reveal deep meanings pertaining to different cultures. However, the processes of meaning creation are still to be investigated in order to establish the relation between cognition and linguistic expression.

When people acquire and use their mother tongue, they appropriate the concepts and classifications related to the world that surrounds them. In general, they do not challenge how the world around them is affected and regulated by their speech, as the whole community shares the same model, both in behaviour and linguistic manifestations.

Moreover, although speakers create linguistic classifications in order to categorise the world around them, they are not aware of how they influence their own language, neither of the linguistic impact on the shared cultural conceptualisations (Palmer, 1996; Wierzbicka, 1999).

2. Literature Review

Understanding the relationship between language and culture and their inherent intertwining stands at the core of intercultural communication nowadays, being of topical interest not only to linguists, but also to anthropologists and international business specialists. Along time, different theoretical frameworks have provided models to delve into the complex notion of culture in relation to linguistic structures (Holland & Quinn, 1987; Geertz, 1973; Kachru & Kahane, 1995; Palmer, 1996; Jackendoff, 2007). By gaining insights into the mental lexicon of a particular language, one can better access the mechanisms that lay behind the interrelations between cognition, knowledge organisation and communication (Aitchison, 2003; Wierzbicka, 1992, 1997). According to the cognitive linguistic theory, one concept is represented in our mind by a series of other concepts that together constitute a coherent whole, in the form of a mental frame. However, there are social and cultural, even ideological concepts that are hardly generalizable, and hence, not universal. The differences between linguistically encoded meanings in various cultures or communities are grounded in cultural models based on assumptions and patterns of thinking engendered by the varying environmental settings and differently conceptualised life experiences. Conversely, similarities identifiable in many languages and cultures, reflect the universality of human conceptualisation paradigms. According to Wierzbicka (1997), linguistic universals afford a common groundwork from which variations found in various languages and cultures are created.

As analysed by Kövecses (2014), an example in case may be the representation of the self, which is variable across different cultures. Thus (pp. 62-65), in Western societies that emphasise the self, the concept is associated with a number 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. Conversely, 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.

Geert Hofstede's anthropological theory of cultural categories (1991) is parallel to the above one, in that he also characterises societies as individualistic versus collectivistic. In individualist societies the ties between people are loose, people tend to look after himself/herself and their immediate families, whereas in collectivistic societies, people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, cherishing family values.

The interrelatedness between language and culture is at play when people belonging to a certain cultural group assign meaning to various linguistic expressions. These interactions are also responsible for how speakers communicate in their daily exchanges. According to Geertz (1973), culture represents "a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life". As long as our brain is shaped by our culture and language represents a strongly cognitive phenomenon, it follows that language will be embodied into a statement of our culture and experience. In Lakoff and Johnson's view (2003), "it would be more correct to say that all experience is cultural through and through, that we experience our "world" in such a way that our culture is already present in the very experience itself".

3. Research Methodology

The aim of this study is to analyse metaphors related to TIME from the business discourse (found in British and Romanian business press), and to identify the patterns of occurrence that are most frequent in the corpora. The main tenet is that cognitive metaphors are instantiations of cultural categories manifested in the language spoken by the community that shares a common set of characteristics within a given cultural matrix.

Our analysis is based on two corpora (British and Romanian), consisting of articles from general audience and financial broadsheets, written during 2012-2015. The newspapers used for this study are: *The Economist, The Guardian, The New York Times* and *The Telegraph* for the English corpus; and *Adevarul, Jurnalul National, Cotidianul, Capital,* and *Ziarul Financiar* for the Romanian corpus.

Apart from the self-made English language corpus, we also resorted to The British National Corpus, as a reference corpus from the general English language. BNC is a collection of approximately 100 million words containing samples of written and spoken language from various sources. The written part (representing about 90% of the corpus) consists of extracts from regional and national newspapers, academic writings and popular fiction, school and university essays, etc. The spoken part consists of orthographic transcriptions of unscripted informal conversations recorded by volunteers and spoken language collected in different contexts, ranging from formal business or government meetings to radio shows and phone-ins.

Identification of metaphor entails identification of "ideational meaning", by which one has to establish whether metaphors can be identified in a text and if there is some "tension between a literal source domain and a metaphorical target domain" (Charteris-Black, 2004). According to Stefanowitsch (2006) there exist three main strategies for extracting linguistic expressions (as cited in Chapeton, 2010):

a) The first strategy is based on searching for source domain vocabulary. This entails selecting a potential source domain and then searching for individual lexical items from this domain using concordancers.

b) The second one resorts to searching for target domain vocabulary. An analysis based exclusively on these two methods will only identify a subset of metaphorical expressions, namely those which contain specific vocabulary belonging to the source or target domain.

c) The third strategy used in the extraction of metaphorical expressions is manual coding. The drawback to this method is that it limits the potential size of the corpus, as the researcher has to carefully read throughout the whole corpus. Moreover, this strategy involves manual annotation, a

very time-consuming and painstaking process. For the purposes of this study, we employed a combined method for the identification of metaphorical linguistic expressions, based on keywords belonging to the target domain and a manual search inside the corpus.

The current research was carried out based on a combination of the above methods in order to identify metaphorical linguistic expressions, starting from headwords from the target domain and 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 we analysed the metaphors found from the perspective of universality and cultural variation.

4. Results and Interpretation

The results of the investigation confirmed 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 (Popescu, 2012).

Time is an abstract concept and has represented the focus of research in various fields, ranging from philosophy to linguistics, from physics to theology, as well as education, sociology or economy. It is widely used and apparently known, but still remains a concept especially difficult to grasp. The way in which we speak about time provides a better understanding of how it is conceptualized. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) underline that: "In our visual systems, we have detectors for motion and detectors for objects / locations. We do not have detectors for time ... Thus, it makes good biological sense that time should be understood in terms of things and motion".

a) TIME is MONEY

The fast pace of technological breakthroughs, globalisation, consumerism and other aspects of postmodern society have contributed to shaping new existential paradigms which have upturned the meanings of everything we used to consider as the norm. One of the emblematic and symptomatic mottos of our business oriented world is that of "time is money". Therefore, not surprisingly, the most frequent occurrences were found in the case of this conceptualisation.

(1) we do have to invest some time initially in sharing (EC, 2011)
(2) having spent lots of time and money since the crisis (EC, 2013)
(3) people's most important resource is their time (EC, 2013)
(4) an excess of meetings is the biggest devourer of time (EC, 2013)
(5) are a substantial waste of the recipients' time (EC, 2015)
(6) how much time Google saves us
(7) Greece's €130bn bailout merely buys it time... (FT, 2012)
(8) in the form of a dividend – for investing in our future. (EC, 2011)

(9) apoi vei avea timp destul pentru note, stari zilnice (DM, 2011)
        then you will have enough time for notes, daily states of mind
(10) le-a permis guvernelor sa castige timp pentru a stapani (CA, 2010)
        allowed the governments to gain time in order to master
(11) merita sa-mi investesc timpul in lectura sa. (DM, 2011)
        it's worth investing time in reading it
(12) vrem sa economisim timp fara sa stim (DM, 2012)
        We want to save time without knowing
(13) e placut sa pierzi timpul si sa te lasi in voia capriciilor (DM, 2012)

it's nice to waste time and let yourself carried away by whims

(14) e atat de bine sa poti scapa de tirania timpului util!(DM, 2012)

it's so good to be able to get away from the useful time's tyranny!

(15) 45 de minute de birou, foarte multi considera ca timpul pierdut pe drum nu merita",

45 minutes away from the office, very many consider that the time wasted is not worth it.

The metaphorical expressions extracted above are based on the following mappings:

Investment → a period of time dedicated to an activity;

Waste → the time spent in unfruitful activities;

Profit-making → either accomplishing something in less time than initially calculated or obtaining an extended deadline.

This set of mappings derived from the metaphor of time are highly conventional, which reveals that people who live by it think of time in terms of profit, try to invest their time in the best possible way and keep waste at a minimum. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) associated the conceptualization of time with the role of work in Western cultures. Since work is typically connected with the time it takes and time is precisely quantified, it has become customary to pay people by the hour, week, or year. TIME IS MONEY in a great deal of ways: telephone message units, hourly wages, yearly budgets, interest on loans, and paying a debt to society by serving time. Therefore, we understand and experience time as the sort of thing that can be spent, wasted, invested wisely or poorly, budgeted, saved, or squandered.

Although the metaphor TIME IS MONEY was encountered with the highest frequency rate in our corpora, the analysis showed that for the Romanian corpus it applied more to the domain of business and technology. The TIME IS MONEY metaphor can be related to the history of industrialization, when work started to be associated with the time it took to be performed. (Lakoff & Johnson 2003: 65) Consequently, its association with the business field and with that of science and technology is perfectly understandable. However, beyond these domains there are other cultural factors to be taken into account.

In Romanian, the conceptualisation of time in general, when referring to business as an economic phenomenon, time is conceptualised as money. Nevertheless, outside this domain, beyond the context of business, TIME IS MONEY may become a synonym of TIME IS A TYRANT:

(16) *De regula, nu ne putem permite asa ceva*, stiu, avem cu totii o agenda plina care ne mana de la spate. Dar macar din cand in cand, in rarele noastre momente de vacanta, de „timp liber", e atat de bine sa poti scapa de *tirania* timpului *util!* (DM, 2012)

As a rule, we cannot afford something like this, I know, we all have a busy agenda, which pushes us from behind. But at least, from time to time, during our rare moment of recess, of "free time", it's so good to be able to get away from the useful time's tyranny!

These results suggest that the Romanian culture emphasises more the idea of "working in order to live" and not the other way round, one of the characteristics of feminine cultures. In this type of culture the dominant values are caring for others and preservation, managers strive for consensus, people value equality, solidarity and quality in their working lives. Conflicts are typically resolved by compromise and negotiation and free time and flexibility are highly appreciated.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

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 coined it. Along this line, the more aware

we are of the similarities and differences in our languages and cultures, the better we can communicate and function successfully, especially in the international business arena. The results of our analysis are in line with Geert Hofstede's framework (2003). According to his research data, Romania scores 42% on the masculinity/ femininity scale, while the United Kingdom registers a score of 66, indicating a masculine society. An interesting perspective might be lent by the anlysis of some proverbs concerning time in both languages, and hance aquire an insight into people's attitude towards time. Such would be a higher concern of the British people for a wiser and more judicious distribution of time, whereas Romanians would be more concerned with the waste of time.

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