

CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS AS IMAGES IN ROMANIAN AND ENGLISH ANTONYMIC PHRASEOLOGIES: “SUCCESS” AND “UNSUCCESS”

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the investigation of the way images are created with the help of the conceptual metaphor within the phraseological units in the English and Romanian linguistic pictures, regarding the antonymic relationship between the concepts of “success” and “unsuccess”. The aim of the article is to find both common and particular components of the English and Romanian antonymic phraseologies that lead to creating images through metaphors related to the concepts mentioned above. The methods used for this research are those of general linguistics, but also those specific to cognitive linguistics. English and Romanian are languages that have many differences from a structural and semantic point of view, and their phraseologies have not been investigated enough, let alone the relation of antonymy between the two concepts proposed.

Keywords: phraseology, antonymy, conceptual metaphor, image representation, success, unsuccess.

Introduction

According to the academic literature dedicated to the study of phraseology, there are certain phraseological units that convey a concept through the images created by the lexemes that are used.

Each linguistic picture is an open window that allows the discovery of different cultural aspects of a community. Phraseological units are words that form fixed constructions which have a certain meaning, but the words used by themselves have other meanings. These permanent structures cannot be constructed by less than two words and they are full of expressivity, so they awaken vivid emotions or images in the mind of the reader or the speaker. The use of phraseological units is very specific, because some are associated with the formal register, they may be used in any situation be it formal or informal such as a scientific article, a fiction book or a business conversation, and with the informal one, such as spontaneous speech among friends or professionals using jargons, including constructions that are associated to the colloquial speech, so they can be used in speech communication as well as in written communication.

The conceptual metaphor

In his work, *The Conduit Metaphor*, Michael Reddy gives examples through which he determines that metaphor originates in thought, not in language, being a major and indispensable component of our conventional way of conceptualizing the world, and everyday behavior reflects the metaphorical understanding of our experiences (Reddy, 1979: 287). George Lakoff states in his article, *The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor*, that metaphor was originally defined as a poetic linguistic or prose expression in which one or more words used to express a concept are used outside the normal conventional

meaning to express a similar concept (Lakoff, 1993: 203). The results of contemporary research on metaphor establish that this term has come to introduce an interdisciplinary mapping in the conceptual system, that is, metaphor is no longer just an instrument of poetic or figurative language, but interferes in everyday speech, where the speaker correlates different domains and creates an interaction between different processes of cognition.

An important aspect to be discussed is the way metaphors create vivid images in the speaker's mind where an abstract idea is transferred into the concrete one with the help of the metaphor (a hidden comparison). Images displaying visual metaphors typically present (different types) perceptually incongruous elements that violate an expected (or "literal") scenario. As an example, the notion of achieving *success*, in Romanian, has the image representation of *a aduce acasă cașcavalul*, or its correspondent in English of *bringing home the bacon*. It is a visual image where a person brings home a type of food that usually is not present in the household, and therefore the individual has been successful in having money or obtaining the necessary food, the type of food indicating what is specific for each culture, the common idea in both languages and cultures being obtaining something to eat. This is the case of how the mental representation of *success* has been rendered to speech by putting it into words which refer to aliments, therefore, something concrete.

Using the same course of action, the mental mapping is achieved by means of phraseological units that refer to colours, human body parts, sound effects or even animal associations that create the image and the feeling of having *success* or that of *failing* at a certain point. In his *Image Metaphors*, Lakoff argues that, with abstract notions, there can be no image mapping because even if there is a source domain image in the aliments, colours, human body parts and so on, the concept of *success* or *unsuccess* has no target domain image (Lakoff, 1987: 222). Being an abstract notion, *success* or *failure* has no visual representation. The emitter creates a certain image when broadcasting a message, but it depends on the receiver to determine what gets mapped onto what. Therefore, in order to understand the speaker, the receiver creates an image mapping and transposes it onto the images proposed by the conceptual metaphors. For example, the phraseological unit *to reap one's laurels* leads the receiver to imagine a person that receives a wreath made of laurel leaves as a sign of success, as result of public appreciation. *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* offers further explanations: *In ancient Greece, a wreath made of bay-tree (laurel) leaves was awarded as a mark of distinction and, in particular, to victors at the Pythian Games held at Delphi.* (Siefring, 2004: 168). However, there is no way to know what the receiver actually imagines when confronted with such metaphors.

The image metaphor

In his article called *Image Metaphors*, Lakoff starts his analysis giving the example of a woman's waist seen *as an hourglass*, leading the reader to transpose the mental image of an "hourglass" to the woman's figure, positioning the narrow portion of the hourglass onto the woman's waist (Lakoff, 1987: 219). His conclusion is that image

metaphors apply to conventional images, representations that are already acquired by the reader or the listener and that do not necessitate to actually see the object in order to understand what the speaker wanted to convey. The one who uses this comparison counts on the fact that the person receiving the message has automatically acquired the notion of an “hourglass” over the years and can easily picture the “woman’s waist” according to the general structure of the object itself, taking up the general forms over the specific details (Lakoff, 1987: 220).

Colin McGinn goes even deeper in his work *Mindsight: Image. Dream. Meaning* and distinguishes perception and visualization when dealing with images (McGinn, 2006: 7). The first mental operation occurs when the individual actually sees the object and perceives its presence. Visualizing refers to merely think about the object, without having it in front of one’s eyes. Therefore, the former is a passive cognition process because it concentrates on feeling without a great conscious effort, and the latter requires an active mind, since it cannot survive without conscious attention (McGinn, 2006: 13). The similarity between the two mental operations consists in the fact that they are both characterized *as visual* (McGinn, 2006: 7): seeing with the sensory organs and seeing with the mind’s eye. Perception presumes a sensory information about the objects of the external world, processed by the brain, whereas images presume a process of the mind where objects are brought forward, without the implication of the outside world (McGinn, 2006: 12). Hence, if the image of an object is a message that does not alter beliefs, mental representations of the same concept can access and interact with higher processes of cognition.

Conceptual metaphors turned into images

Even if, as mentioned before, Lakoff states that to talk about an image metaphor, it is necessary to have a source domain image that should be transposed onto a target domain image, the author also concedes that sometimes it is possible for a source domain to create an image for an abstract target domain.

The phraseological units presented in the two tables are collected from *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (Siefring, 2004) for the English section and *Dicționar frazeologic englez-român* (Nicolescu, Popovici, Preda, 1967) for the Romanian part, and they convey the concepts of *success* and *unsuccess*, abstract notions highlighted through metaphors that are created using mental representations of colours, human body parts, food or animals.

Table 1. The concept of *SUCCESS*

<i>English</i>	<i>Romanian</i>
1. bring home the bacon	1. a aduce acasă cașcavalul
2. bring home the honey	
3. kill two birds with one stone	2. a nimeri doi iepuri dintr-o împușcătură
4. break a leg (AE)	-
5. blow the doors off	-
6. go like a bomb	-

7. cook on the front burner	-
8. on the crest of a wave	3. a fi pe val
9. on a roll	
10. fly high	-
11. with flying colours	4. cu brio/cinste
12. hit the mark	5. a merge la țintă
13. scoop the kitty	-
14. get one's foot on the ladder	6. a face primul pas pe calea succesului
15. make a big/huge hit	7. a avea un success răsunător
16. reap one's laurels	8. a-și culege laurii
17. drive the nail home	9. a duce la bun sfârșit
18. bring down the house	10. a avea un succes monstru

Table 2. The concept of *UNSUCCESS*

English	Romanian
1. draw a blank	-
2. do something until you are blue in the face	-
3. cook on the back burner	-
4. fall flat	-
5. go downhill	1. a merge la vale
6. cut your losses	-
7. come up dry	2. a fi pe uscat
8. lay an egg	-
9. go down the drain	3. a se duce pe apa sâmbetei
10. a spanner in the works	4. a pune bețe în roate
11. as one door closes, another opens	5. o ușă se închide, alta se deschide
12. kiss of death	-

The antonymic relation between the two concepts is highlighted at the lexical level. Where *success* is rendered through verbs like: *bring, fly, drive, blow, make, reap* etc., the concept of *unsuccess* is presented through: *cut, draw, fall, go, close, lay* etc. Antonymy is present with nouns as well: *colours, crest, mark, hit, laurel* are on the winning part, whereas *blank, losses, drain, death* etc. signify failure, lack of success. Adjectives are highly engaged within the visual metaphors regarding the two concepts: *flying, front, huge, big* oppose adjectives like *blue, flat, back, dry*.

Another classification can be made at the semantic level. For example, *fly high* can be opposed to *fall flat* or *go downhill*, *with flying colours* – *draw a blank*, *cook on the front burner* – *cook on the back burner*, *drive the nail home* – *a spanner in the works*, and so on.

Comparing the English metaphoric representation with the Romanian one from the two tables, it is clear that the English linguistic picture offers more images rendered by phraseological units related to *success* or *unsuccess* than the Romanian one.

This comes as an echo of the differences between the two cultures, the views that the members of their communities have upon *success* or *failure*. If the first concept

triggers mostly the same reaction: the joy of succeeding, the happiness of reaching a goal, the determination to try again, etc., the second concept is treated differently in the two cultures.

Romanians frown upon mistakes and failure. The individual that experiences a failure is often stigmatized, due to the education received by the people during the communism and the lifestyle full of restrictions that they had to endure in that time. Even if communism has been eradicated more than 30 years ago, the belief that failure and mistakes must be punished is often carried on to the next generation. In her article, *Cultura antreprenorială în România: cum ștergi peste 40 de ani în care eșecul a fost blamat*, Oana Coșman offers a selection of experiences and thoughts of Romanian entrepreneurs, collected on the occasion of the launching of the *Muzeul antreprenoriatului: 100 de ani de antreprenoriat în România*. She quotes Mr. Cosmin Alexandru, dean of The Entrepreneurship Academy, the first of this kind in Romania, saying that the educational system in Romania still tends to penalize failure and mistakes, leading students to often say that it is better to do nothing than to fail at doing something (Coșman, 2018, website). In order to change this mentality, failure and mistakes should be seen as a normal step towards success.

In opposition to the Romanian perception, the English and American view of unsuccess is a totally different one. It goes so far that a 'culture of failure' has been created, a set of shared values, goals and practices that encourage learning through experimentation. People spend time failing, then they get up and try again, until they succeed. It is the base for innovation and creation. Having no more fear of failure, a person is capable of observing what goes wrong and do it right the second time. So, unsuccess is not made of errors and it does not lead to defeat, but it is seen as virtuous because it allows a person to make better decisions and succeed more. (Moulard, 2018: website).

Because of the clear cultural differences and opposed beliefs, many of the English phraseological units do not have correspondent ones in Romanian.

Conclusions

The article has intended to research the creation of images through conceptual metaphors that apply to the two concepts proposed: *success* and *unsuccess*. The arguments presented have led to the conclusion that images can be obtained through conceptual metaphors even in the case of abstract notions, such as the concepts mentioned above. While image metaphors are required to have a source domain image that gets transposed onto the target domain image, conceptual metaphors can create images even if there is no source domain image. This is possible due to the fact that there are images which are acquired automatically and unconsciously over a long period of time and which can be easily processed with the aid of perception and visualization, so the receiver can understand the message of a person that speaks or uses such metaphors. The antonymy of the proposed concepts can be found either at the lexical level, or at the semantic level, for both linguistic pictures. The English phraseological units do not have corresponding phraseological units in Romanian, because the cultural

beliefs are very different. The English have always embraced either *success* or *unsuccess*, whereas the Romanians have always blamed *failure*.

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