# *CONCEPTUAL MOTIVATION OF ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN* SHOULDER, ARM *AND* HAND *IDIOMS. A CONTRASTIVE APPROACH*

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***Abstract:*** *Phraseology is considered to be one of the most controversial domains of linguistics. The paper analyses from a cognitive perspective a series of English and Romanian shoulder, arm and hand idioms. The cognitive frame provides an adequate explanation for most of these idioms. This paper is based on the cognitive hypothesis according to which idioms are motivated by conceptual structures: conventional knowledge, conceptual metonymies and metaphors. We also try to demonstrate that there is a considerable degree of correspondence between English and Romanian in that there are shoulder, arm and hand idioms in both languages which share the same figurative meaning, as well as the same underlying conceptual mechanisms.*

***Keywords:*** *cognitive semantics, cross-cultural cognitive motivation, idiom.*

## 1. Introduction

The study of phraseology is one of the most difficult and debatable aspects of modern linguistics. Describing idioms and idiomaticity is a very complex problem which should be analysed from the formal, functional as well as from the semantic perspective.

In *Longman Idioms Dictionary* (2001: VII) an idiom is defined as a "sequence of words which has a different meaning as a group from the meaning it would have if you understand each word separately".

An idiom is a conventionalized multiword expression whose units are mostly semantically vague.

While traditional linguists study mainly the formal and functional aspects connected to idioms, cognitive linguists have a completely different view. Without totally denying the traditional perspective according to which the meaning of an idiom cannot be completely inferred from the meaning of its components, these linguists consider that there exists a systematic conceptual motivation for a large number of idioms. Most idioms are products of our conceptual system and not simply a matter of language. An idiom is not just an expression that has a meaning somehow special in relation to the meanings of its constituent parts, but its meaning arises from our more general knowledge of the world embodied in our conceptual system. In other words, the majority of idioms are conceptual, and not linguistic, in nature (Kövecses, Szabó, 1996:330).

Idioms are conceptually motivated in the sense that there are cognitive strategies such as metaphor, metonymy and conventional knowledge which link the literal meaning with the figurative idiomatic one. This view is also shared by Gibbs (1997:142) who claims that "idioms do not exist as separate semantic units within the lexicon, but actually reflect coherent systems of metaphorical concepts".

The term *conventional knowledge*, as a cognitive mechanism, designates what is shared about a conceptual domain by the people belonging to the same culture. This

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knowledge includes, for example, the body part corresponding to a conceptual domain. Lakoff (1987:446) suggests that people have in their minds large sets of conventional images of world around them, depending upon their specific culture. Conventional images are context independent and they remain in our subconscious sometimes for the rest of our life.

Cognitive semantics considers that many idioms are also based on conceptual metonymies and metaphors which connect the concrete and abstract areas of knowledge.

The cognitive frame provides an adequate explanation for body parts idioms. In most of the cases, more than one cognitive mechanism contributes to the motivation of the idiomatic meaning; this motivation results from the combination of three factors: conventional knowledge, metonymy and metaphor. Idioms which make use of parts of the human body are more predictable than others, simply because as human beings we are more familiar with our perception of the shape, size and functions of individual parts of our own bodies, since we experience them every day. In these cases the notion of embodiment can be easily applied. The idiomatic language is mostly anthropocentric, i.e. it is focused on people, on their behaviour, perceptions of their environment, on their physical and emotional states (Bílková, 2000:6).

If we consider that some idioms are partly semantically transparent, and also that their meaning can be determined by means of conceptual mappings between source and target domains, we may analyse in detail the idiomatic structures in any language. Are there idiomatic structures common to several languages? Are there conceptual metaphors, metonymies and conventional knowledge present in all languages? Is there a conceptual pattern common to all languages?

Starting from these aspects, we propose an analysis from a cognitive perspective of a series of English and Romanian idioms pertaining to the conceptual domains of *shoulder, arm* and *hand.* The analysis is based on the cognitive hypothesis according to which idioms are motivated by the above mentioned conceptual structures. Since in the process of inferring the meaning, the speakers activate first of all the idiom key words, the total figurative meaning can be anticipated from the meanings of its components. It would be equally interesting to notice whether the speakers of English and Romanian have many common elements in the way they conceptualize these very important parts of their human body.

We shall first examine the general conventional knowledge which conceptually motivates the meaning of a few idioms containing the words *shoulder, arm* and *hand* as the first cognitive mechanism which connects the physical (or source) domain of our knowledge about these body parts with the abstract (or target) domain of knowledge which arises when these words are used in idiomatic expressions. Next, conceptual metonymies and metaphors which underlie various idiomatic phrases will be presented. To demonstrate that the same conventional knowledge and conceptual metaphors and metonymies can be found both in English and Romanian, examples will be given from both these languages, thus enabling us to draw a parallel between them.

The analysed idioms have been collected from standard dictionaries of idioms: *Longman Idioms Dictionary- LID* (2001), *Oxford Idioms. Dictionary for Learners of English* (2001) - *OID* and Dicţionar *de expresii şi locuţiuni ale limbii române- DELLR* (1985), but also other dictionaries of both English and Romanian have been consulted.



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**2. Shoulder idioms**

**2.1. Conventional knowledge** motivates the following English and Romanian *shoulder* idioms:

- *somebody is looking over his or her shoulder* is used to say that someone is very worried or is being very careful because they expect that something dangerous or unpleasant may happen to them:
  *Many employees **are looking over their shoulder**, wondering if they will be the next to lose their job.*
  *Despite its dominance in the luxury car market, Mercedes has admitted* **to looking over its shoulder** *at the growing Japanese industry* (*LID*, 306).
  There is no Romanian equivalent.
- *somebody is looking over your shoulder* 'someone is checking and judging what you are doing, because they do not trust you to do it properly or well' has a Romanian equivalent with the same lexical structure, but the meaning is different: *a se uita la cineva peste umăr* or *a privi pe cineva peste umăr* 'to despise somebody':
  English: *Even if I get this promotion, I will still have **my boss looking over my shoulder.***
  *With cameras filming every play of the game, the referees are nervous. It is not easy to do your job with technology **looking over your shoulder*** (*LID*, 307).
  Romanian: *Vedea ea bine că soacra **se uită la ea cam peste umăr**, dar se făcea că nu-i pasă* (Duda, G. et alii., 1985, 753).
- *put your shoulder to the wheel* ' to start to work with great effort and determination' has a Romanian counterpart: *a pune umărul.* The Romanian phrase has also the meaning 'to help, to support somebody'
  English: *You are an intelligent young man, and I know you can get a good degree if you will only **put your shoulder to the wheel*** (*LID*, 307).
  Romanian: *Măcar acum de-**ar fi pus umărul Glanetașu*** (Liviu Rebreanu, ap. *DLRLC, IV*: 568).
  *Mereu **punea umărul** unde era nevoie.*
  These idioms are also motivated by the conceptual metonymies THE SHOULDER STANDS FOR THE PERSON and THE SHOULDER STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY.
- *straight from the shoulder* 'to talk in a direct and truthful way, though you may have to say something unpleasant':
  *Bonar Law gave his followers an analysis of the situation **straight from the shoulder**, with no false optimism about their immediate prospects.*
  *I would like to hear your impressions of the town and its leading citizens **straight from the shoulder**- so tell me exactly what you think* (*LID*, 307).
  This is an idiom from boxing. When your hand comes straight from the shoulder, you hit your opponent very hard.
  There is no Romanian equivalent expression.
- *rub shoulders with somebody* 'to meet and spend time with people who are different from you, especially people who are important and famous'. It has no Romanian counterpart.
  *You could win a trip with the Grammys in New York, and **rub shoulders with the stars.***



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*The main thing about a conference if you are new and inexperienced, is that you **are rubbing shoulders with people who know the business and are influential*** (*LID*, 307).

The metonymy THE SHOULDER STANDS FOR THE PESON can also be considered a cognitive source.

- *shrug shoulders* 'to express ignorance, perplexity, indifference, to feel unable to do anything' has a Romanian corresponding idiomatic expression *a da, a ridica din umeri*

English: *Both speakers left them **shrugging their shoulders**.*

Romanian*: I-am întrebat pe toți, dar ei **ridicau din umeri**. Nu aveau nciun răspuns.*

*I-am expus situația**, dar a ridicat din umeri** cu indiferență.*

Conventional knowledge also motivates the Romanian idiom:

- *a-și lua călcâiele de-a umeri* 'to run very fast':

*M-am smucit voinicește din ghearele ce mă prinseseră de gît; **mi- am luat călcâiele de-a umeri**; și ne-am dus* (Vasile Alecsndri, ap. *DLRLC, IV:* 568*).*

**2.2. Conceptual metonymies**

We have already discussed that some of the above idioms are cognitively motivated by conceptual metonymies.

THE SHOULDER STANDS FOR THE PERSON

- *a shoulder to cry on* is used about someone whom you can tell about your problems and ask for sympathy and advice:

*My office is at the end of the corridor. Come and see me if you need **a shoulder to cry on.***

*The organization provides support and **a** valuable **shoulder to cry on** for families who have lost a parent.*

*All three of the boys would stop over and **cry on my dad's shoulder**, mostly complaining about how strict their dad was* (*LID*, 307).

There is a Romanian counterpart- *a plânge pe umărul cuiva:*

*Când i se întâmpla ceva, venea și **pângea pe umărul meu.***

- *carry or feel the weight of the world on your shoulders*, used to say that someone feels very worried and unhappy because of their problems or the things they have to do, especially when they think they are even greater than they really are, has Romanian equivalent expressions: *a purta o povară pe umeri, a pune cuiva ceva pe umeri* 'to blame somebody' and *a lăsa ceva pe umerii cuiva:*

English: *Until his appeal is heard by the higher courts, Bridges continue*s **to *carry the weight of the world on his shoulders***.

*If there is one thing I would try to stop, it's Steve feeling like he has to win the game and do everything himself. He'**s** always **feeling the weight of the world on his shoulders*** (*LID*, 378).

Romanian: ***Purta pe umeri o povară** mult prea grea. Trebuia să se ocupe singur de tot și de aceea era atât de nefericit*.

*Grea vină **i se pusese pe umeri**, dar era hotarât să facă orice pentru a scoate adevărul la lumină* (Duda, G. et alii., 1985, 753).

Conventional knowledge also plays an important role here.

THE PERSON STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY

- *shoulder to shoulder* has an identical idiomatic counterpart in Romanian- *umăr la umăr*. These idioms have two meanings :



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1. 'people are close together' This idiomatic meaning is conceptually motivated by the conventional knowledge and the metonymy THE SHOULDER STANDS FOR THE PERSON :
English : *The students stood **shoulder to shoulder**, listening to his speech.*
Romanian : *Stăteau **umăr la umăr** în acea cămăruță, așteptând să cumpere bilete.*
2. 'people are working together in an attempt to achieve something or defend something' In this case, the main cognitive mechanism is the metonymy THE SHOULDER STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY:
English: *We remembered the days when we had fought **shoulder to shoulder** against the invaders* (*LID*, 307).
Romanian: *Erau hotărâți sa câștige și lucrau la proiect **umăr la umăr.***

**3. Arm idioms**

**3.1. Conventional knowledge** is relevant for the following English and Romanian *arm* idioms:

- *chance your arm* means 'to try to do something that is new or involves a risk, even though you doubt you will succeed':
  *You won't get anything done in life if you **don't chance your arm sometimes*** (*LID, 7*).
  There is no Romanian equivalent.
- *cost an arm and a leg* 'something is very expensive' has no Romanian correspondent:

*That carpet must have **cost an arm and a leg.***
*Once you are there everything is cheap, it's only the flight that **costs an arm and a leg**.*
There is also the variant *pay/spend an arm and a leg:*
*Two years ago we **paid an arm and a leg** for this printer, and now it is obsolete!* (*LID, 7*).

- *somebody would give his /her right arm to do something or for something* means 'to want something very much, especially something that is very difficult or impossible to get'*:*

English**: *I'd give my right arm to be able to sing** like that.*
***She'd have given her right arm for a job** like yours, but she didn't have the qualifications* (*LID*, 7).

A possible Romanian equivalent might be *a-și tăia mai degrabă o mână decât să facă un anume lucru:*
***Își tăia mai degrabă o mână decât să facă un asemenea compromis.***

- *twist somebody's arm* 'to persuade someone to do something that they have said they do not want to do':
  *I'll call her and **twist her arm** a little- I think she'll give him the money.*
  *Hammer said she had **to twist Taylor's arm** to get him to support the stadium* (*LID*, 7*).*
- *have your arm twisted:*
  *Many party loyalists were upset at **having had their arms so firmly twisted** on the health-care bill.*
  *The bill was saved from a major defeat in the Assembly´s Ways and Means Commmittee only after intense last –minute **arm twisting*** (LID, 7).



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These idioms seem to be motivated not only by conventional knowledge, but also by the conceptual meonymies THE ARM STANDS FOR THE PERSON and THE ARM STANDS FOR ACTIVITY.

In Romanian we have a similar idiom, but containing the lexeme *mână* '*hand*'*: a forța mâna cuiva:*

***I-a forțat mâna*** *să facă asta împotriva voinței sale.*

- *welcome or greet somebody with open arms* 'to show that you are very happy to see or meet someone, or to have him, here, as part of your group, organization etc.':

  ***Eric will be welcomed back with open arms*** *by his teammates.*

  *When we came to England after the wedding, my new in-laws* ***greeted me with open arms.***

  *Even if you do not have the money for a fancy tourist hotel, Rio* ***is waiting for you with open arms*** (LID, 8).

  In Romanian there is an idiomatic counterpart: *a primi* or *a întâmpina cu brațele deschise:*

  *Mai bine haidem la culcare, că* ***ne așteaptă*** *omul împăratului cu masa întinsă, făcliile aprinse și* ***cu brațele deschise*** (Ion Creangă, ap. *DLRC, I*, 271).
- *keep somebody at arm's length* 'to avoid becoming too friendly with somebody'*:*

*He is the kind of man who's best* ***kept at arm's length****, in my opinion* (OID, 9).

In Romanian there is an equivalent*: a ține pe cineva la distanță.*

- *a list as long as your arm* (informal) meaning'a list with many things to do, buy, etc. on it' has no Romanian counterpart:

*I've got a list* ***as long as your arm*** *of things I need to buy for the party* (OID, 218*).*

- *a shot in the arm (informal) means* 'a thing or an action that gives somebody or something new energy, help or encouragement or provides a quick solution to a problem':

  *The discovery of gas reserves was a much-needed* ***shot in the arm*** *for the economy* (OID, *349*).

  This phrase refers to an injection of a drug. There is no Romanian equivalent.
- *a babe in arms means* 'a helpless, inexperienced or innocent person':

  *He's* ***a babe in arms*** *in financial matter****s*** (OID, 218*).*

  In Romanian there is no counterpart**.**
- *throw up your arms or hands in despair, horror, etc.* show that you disagree strongly with something, or are very worried about something*:*

  *When she said she wanted to get a motorbike, her parents* ***threw up their arms in horror*** (OID, 404*)*

  This phrase has idiomatic equivalents in Romanian: *a-și pune mâinile în cap/ a se lua cu mâinile de cap:*

  *Când a auzit ce spunea i-a venit* ***să se ia cu mâinile de cap.***

**3.2. Conceptual metonymies and metaphors**

As we have already noticed in the case of *twist somebody's arm,* conceptual metonymies (THE ARM STANDS FOR THE PERSON and THE ARM STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY) motivate certain English and Romanian *arm* idioms, thus providing the link between their literal and idiomatic meanings.

THE ARM STANDS FOR THE PERSON



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- *the long arm of the law* meaning 'the ability of the police and the legal system to find criminals and punish them' has the Romanian equivalent *brațul lung al legii.*

English: *You have to be a very clever criminal to escape* ***the long arm of the law*** (*OID*, 218).

Romanian : ***Brațul lung al legii*** *l-a ajuns până la urmă.*

- *a arunca pe cineva în brațele cuiva* 'to leave a person at someone's disposal':

***O aruncaseră in brațele unui asasin***.

In Romanian the metaphor TO KEEP SOMEBODY IN HIS/ HER ARMS IS TO PROTECT SOMEBODY (A ȚINE PE CINEVA ÎN BRAȚE ÎNSEAMNĂ A- L PROTEJA) is also active:

- *a ține pe cineva în brațe:*

*Nu știa nimeni cine* ***îl ținea în brațe****, dar era, oricum, o persoană importantă, căci își permitea să facă ce vrea.*

**4. Hand Idioms**

**4.1. Conventional knowledge**

The conventional knowledge represents a source of cognitive motivation for many English and Romanian *hand* idiomatic expressions. Here are a few examples:

The phrase *put/stick your hand into your pocket* 'to pay a lot for something' has a Romanian equivalent *a băga mâna adânc în buzunar*.

English: *Havers* ***dipped his hand into his own pocket*** *when he heard how one of his plumbers had charged a single mother $300 for a simple job.*

*Geoff Chapple* ***dug deep into his pocket*** *to pay for the brothers to come from New Zealand to play on the team.*

*All he's done is* ***put his hand in his pocket*** *whenever we've asked, and laid out hundreds of thousands of dolars* (LID, 267).

Romanian: *A trebuit* ***să bage mâna adânc în buzunar*** *şi să plătească tot ce comandase soţia sa.*

The idiomatic expression *be caught with your hand in the cookie jar/till* has the meaning 'to be caught stealing or doing something illegally'. In Romanian, a possible equivalent would be *a fi prins cu mâna în sac/traistă*. Two cognitive strategies function here: conventional knowledge and the metonymy THE HAND STANDS FOR ACTIVITY.

English: *The government was willing to win at all costs and* ***got caught with its hand in the cookie jar****.*

*When you* ***are caught with the hand in the cookie jar****, you apologize and take responsibility. You don't lie about what you've done* (*LID*, 150).

Romanian: *N-a mai putut să nege fiindcă* ***a fost prins cu mâna în sac****.*

The idioms *come (readily) to hand* and *have/keep something (ready) to hand* have the meaning 'to find something easily'.

According to the cognitive hypothesis, these idioms are also motivated by more than one conceptual structure: general knowledge and the metonymies THE HAND STANDS FOR THE PERSON and THE HAND STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY:

English: *Organize your wardrobe so that the most useful items* ***are*** *most* ***readily to hand****.*



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*I didn't have time to think – I smashed the window with the nearest thing that* ***came to hand*** (LID, 150).

There are similar Romanian expressions: *a avea ceva la îndemână, a (nu) fi la îndemână, a nu-i fi la îndemână.*

*Lasă că* ***am*** *eu* ***la îndemână****…Trebuie să schimb şi, fără să controleze ţidula, i-o restitui lui Mişu, cu o bancnotă.* (Ion Vinea, in *DELLR*, p. 309)

*Nu-i era deloc* ***la îndemână*** *să-i mărturisească adevărul.*

In Romanian we also have the opposite idiom: *a-i fi/a-i veni cuiva ceva peste mână* ('something is inconvenient for somebody'):

*Le* ***vine*** *cam* ***peste mână*** *târgul.* (Ion Creangă, ap. *DLR, VI*, p. 663)

The idiom *hold somebody's hand* with the idiomatic meaning 'to help somebody in a difficult or unusual situation' has possible Romanian counterparts: *a duce de mână pe cineva, a ţine de mână pe cineva*.

Here, again, we have three conceptual mechanisms: conventional knowledge, the metonymy THE HAND STANDS FOR ACTIVITY and the metaphor HOLDING HANDS IS COOPERATING.

*With easy-to-follow instructions, Delia's cookbook* ***holds your hand*** *throughout the preparation of Christmas dinner.*

*You'll do a great job, Loretta – you don't need someone* ***to hold your hand*** *or make decisions for you* (LID, 151).

Romanian: *Trebuia să fie* ***dus de mână****, altfel nu s-ar fi descurcat în cele mai elementare treburi.*

The phrase *sit on your hands* has the meaning 'to not involve in solving a problem or in something where you can be useful'. The same meaning is rendered in Romanian by : *a sta cu mâinile încrucişate/în şolduri* and *a sta cu mâinile în sân.*

Another conceptual motivation functioning here is the metonymy THE HAND STANDS FOR ACTIVITY.

English: *The coal industry fell to pieces while the Government* ***sat on its hands*** *and did nothing.*

*Unless companies stop* ***sitting on their hands*** *and start taking some risks the economy will remain stagnant* (*LID*, 154).

Romanian: *"Adică ai vrea* ***să stăm cu mâinile în sân*** *şi ei să-şi facă de cap?"* (A. Buzura in *DELLR*, 388)

*Dacă turcul se va ridica cu putere asupra noastră* [...] *atunci nici noi nu* ***vom sta cu mâinile în şolduri*** (S. F. Marian în *DLR, VI*, p. 665).

The Romanian expression *a sta cu mâinile în şolduri* has also the meaning 'to have no worry':

*"Puteare-aş să umblu eu/ Tot* ***cu mâinile în şolduri****."* (Ioan Urban Jarník - Andrei Bîrseanu, *DLR, VI*, 665).

The expression *hand in glove* has two idiomatic meanings. In British English (1) the meaning is 'two persons are involved in something illegal' and in American English (2), the idiom has a positive connotation: 'two things fit together and function very well'.

In Romanian we have an equivalent for the second meaning, but using the lexeme *deget* '*finger*'*- a fi cu cineva ca degetul cu mănuşa* :

English: (1) *Both men were working* ***hand in glove*** *with extremist organizations.*

*Big business and the government are* ***hand in glove****, and neither wants wages to rise.*



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(2) *Glass's Eastern - inspired music fits the Indian theme of his opera* ***hand in glove*** (*LID*, 151).

Romanian: *Vă potriveați perfect.* ***Erați ca degetul cu mănușa*****.**

- *show /tip your hand* 'to allow other people to know your plans in a competition with possible advantages for them'. There is no Romanian counterpart.

English: *The general always waited for his enemies* ***to show their hand*** *before committing his forces.*

*There's no need* ***to tip our hand*** *at this stage of the negotiations* (*LID*, 151).

**4.2. Conceptual metonymies**

The metonymy THE HAND STANDS FOR ACTIVITY underlies one of the most important lexicalized meanings of the word *hand* 'labour, activity'.

Kövecses and Szabó (1996:340) consider that this metonymy is based on the fact that many prototypical activities are manual, and that this metonymy is a special case of the general metonymy THE INSTRUMENT STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY.

- *give/lend somebody a hand* means 'to help somebody '. The Romanian counterpart is *a da o mână de ajutor.*

English: *Right,* ***give*** *me* ***a hand*** *with this rubbish - it's all got to go to the dump.*

*Steve came over to see if he could* ***lend a hand*** *after we had the fire.*

*We have a special offer on wallpaper, which includes* ***giving people a helping hand*** *in putting it up (LID, 151*).

Romanian: *Te-ai dus chiar până acolo* ***să dai mână de ajutor****/ Ucigaşilor ce asupră-mi încercat-au un omor.* (Alexandru Davila, ap. *DLRLC, III*, 101)

In this case, conventional knowledge also has an important role.

- *the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing* or *the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing* has a Romanian equivalent with the same lexical structure: *nu ştie stânga ce face dreapta.*

These phrsases are used to show that the activities of a group or institution are not well coordinated and confusion may occur.

English: *Because* ***the right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing****, I was asked to pay for medical treatment, when I was entitled to receive it free.*

*We've already filled in those forms. It's* ***the left hand not finding out what the right's doing*** *again (LID*, 152).

Romanian: *În această secţie* ***nu ştie stânga ce face dreapta*** *şi lucrurile nu merg deloc bine.*

A complete conceptual motivation of this idiom is also rendered by the metaphor TO COOPERATE IS TO PUT HANDS TOGETHER and by the metonymy THE HAND STANDS FOR THE PERSON.

THE HAND STANDS FOR THE SKILL motivates the following idiomatic expressions:

- *to be a dab hand at/with something* 'to be good at something, to have a special skill'.

English: ***I'm*** *quite* ***a dab hand with*** *a hammer and nails. – I can help fix the floor, if you like.*

*If you* ***are a dab hand at*** *organizing and have some spare time, why not help with our Comic relief fund – raising night?* (*LID*, 150).



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Possible Romanian equivalents would be *a avea mână bună* and *a fi bun de mână*. The meanings of these expressions are: a) 'to be skilfull'; b) 'to bring somebody luck': *Iaca o nuntă, adăugă Alexandru. Ai **mână bună**, însoară-mă şi pe mine*. (Dimitrie Bolintineanu, ap. *DLRLC, VI*, 664); c) (at cards) 'to give good cards at the table'.

- *somebody's hand is out* ('to lose one's skill') has a Romanian counterpart: *a-şi ieşi din mână*.

Romanian: *Nu mai pictase de mult şi-şi **ieşise** complet **din mână**.*

THE HAND STANDS FOR THE PERSON

- *force somebody's hand* has a Romanian equivalent with an identical lexicalization : *a forţa mâna cuiva* (see also *twist somebody's arm)*

It seems that the conventional knowledge and the metonymies THE HAND STANDS FOR THE PERSON and THE HAND STANDS FOR ACTIVITY link the literal meaning to the idiomatic one: 'to impose somebody to act against his or her will'.

English: *I was trying to decide what to do about admitting my mistake, when McKay **forced my hand**.*

*Caroline says she **didn't force her husband's hand** when he began to think about resigning, but she's glad he has done it (LID*, 150).

Romanian: *Nu a vrut să vândă casa, dar rudele **i-au forţat mâna**.*

- *somebody/something is in safe hands* 'to be under the responsibility of a reliable person' has a Romanian equivalent *a fi pe mâini sigure/bune*:

English: *Don't worry, **Kara's in safe hands**. Dr. Peters is the best surgeon I know.*

*Travelling with Cosmos, you can get on board conveniently close to home, know your luggage **is in safe hands**, and travel in comfort to your hotel near Paris* (*LID*, 154).

Romanian: *Nu te teme, **eşti pe mâini sigure**.*

*L-am lăsat **pe mâini bune**. N-ai nici o grijă!*

The metonymies THE HAND STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY and THE HAND STANDS FOR RESPONSIBILITY also function here.

- *have a hand in doing something* has the idiomatic meaning 'to be involved in something'. There is also another cognitive source THE HAND STANDS FOR ACTIVITY.

In Romanian, the idiom *e mâna cuiva* has a negative connotation, being used for one's involvement in an activity with negative consequences.

English: *Thorpe is a gifted young architect who's **had a hand in restoring** 20 houses designed by Franck Lloyd Wright.*

*Families in the area now **have a hand in controling** their environment and they are working together to help each other* (*LID*, 151).

Romanian: *E ceva suspect aici. Cred că **e mâna lui**.*

THE HAND STANDS FOR CONTROL/AUTHORITY motivates the following idioms:

- *have the whip hand over somebody* with the idiomatic meaning 'to be able to control somebody' has no Romanian counterpart.

*The kidnappers might get over-confident if they think they **have the whip hand**.*

*The power to dissolve Parliament gives the Prime Minister **the whip hand over other** members of the Government (LID*, 151).

- *the heavy hand of* referring to the authority of an institution has as possible Romanian equivalents *braţul legii* and *a da pe mâna justiţiei*.



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English: *Political opposition struggled to survive under* ***the heavy hand of*** *the secret police.*

*Sykes was known in the department for having* ***a heavy hand.*** *Few of his employees stayed more than a year or two* (*LID*, 151).

Romanian: *Şi repet: cine mai poartă în mod individual şi izolat, pe străzi, armă, va fi dezarmat şi* ***dat pe mâna justiţiei*** (Marin Preda in *DELLR*, 389).

**4.3. Conceptual metaphors**

CONTROL IS HOLDING IN THE HAND.

The experiential hypothesis shows that this metaphor is based on the conventional knowledge of our everyday experience.

- *get out of hand/ be out of one's hand* has the idiomatic meaning 'to be out of somebody's control'. The Romanian corresponding equivalent is *a scăpa din mână.*

English: *Counsellors said that male students are usually reluctant to discuss their personal problems before they* ***get out of hand****. That's my one regret that the situation* ***got out of hand*** *(LID*, 150).

Romanian: *Simţea că fiii săi îi* ***scăpaseră*** *complet* ***din mână****.*

- *take something in hand* means 'to assume responsibility for something'. There are similar expressions in Romanian: *a lua frâiele în mâini*; *a-şi lua viaţa/destinul în mâini*.

English: *If there was trouble with lads misbehaving, the local policeman* ***took it in hand*** *and sorted it out* (*LID*, 152).

Romanian: *S-a hotărât* ***să ia frâiele în mâini*** *şi să rezolve problema.*

- *fall/get into somebody's hands* has the figurative idiomatic meaning 'to be, to get in somebody's possession'. It has a negative connotation. Yet, the Romanian counterpart *a-i cădea/încăpea/pica cuiva ceva în mână/mâini* has not always a negative meaning:

English: *Some gun dealers have stopped selling replicas, because they're worried about them* ***getting into the wrong hands*** (*LID*, 153).

Romanian: *Din păcate, toate documentele* ***au căzut în mâinile*** *unor oameni necinstiţi.*

***Mi-a căzut în mână*** *o carte interesantă.*

The idiomatic meaning of such *hand* idioms is also motivated by conventional knowledge and by the conceptual metaphor POSSESSION IS HOLDING IN THE HAND.

- *in the hands of somebody.* There is also a Romanian similar idiom: *a fi în mâinile cuiva.*

English: *I'll leave the matter* ***in our hands****, but if you need anything, just ask* (*LID*, 154).

Romanian: *Soarta lui* ***era în mâinile*** *acestor oameni.*

The opposite expression, *out of somebody's hands*, meaning 'to have no control over a person or a situation', has no Romanian idiomatic correspondent.

*If the city council can't control their budget, it will be taken* ***out of their hands****.* (*LID*, 154).

- *play right into somebody's hands* has the meaning 'to do exactly what your enemy wants you to do, but you are not aware of it'. In our language there is not an equivalent.

*The other two factions* ***had played right into his hands****; too busy destroying each other to notice him* (*LID*, 154).



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Here the motivation seems to be more complex. The conventional knowledge may have an important role (the image of a cards game metaphorically extended to any dispute and competition) and also the metonymy HAND STANDS FOR THE PERSON.

POSSESSION IS HOLDING IN THE HAND

The prototypic case of possession is to hold the object in your hand, which seems to lead to this metaphor.

- *get/lay your hands on something* has a Romanian counterpart with an identical structure *a pune mâna pe ceva :*

English: *I'd buy a new car if only I could* ***lay my hands on*** *the money* (*LID*, 15).

Romanian: […] *spânul* ***pune mâna pe cartea, pe banii şi pe armele fiului de crai*** *şi le ie la sine* ( Duda, G. et alii., 1985, 391).

- *get/lay your hands on somebody* has a Romanian equivalent : *a pune mâna pe cineva.* In English the idiom is used especially in threatens, in Romanian it does not always have a threatening meaning, since it can also mean 'to find the person you need'.

English: *Just wait until* ***I get my hands on*** *the person who stole my bike* (*OID*, 155).

Romanian: *Ioane, nu ştii tu unde-aş putea* ***pune mâna pe*** *lăutari?* (*DLRLC*, 100)

The conceptual motivation is achieved through the metaphor CONTROL IS HOLDING IN THE HAND and, for The Romanian expression also through POSSESSION IS HOLDING IN THE HAND. The conventional images have an important role, too.

- *have time on your hands* with the figurative meaning' to have a lot of time at your disposal' has no Romanian equivalent.

*If you find that you* ***have too much time on your hands*** *when you retire, take up a new interest* (*LID*, 352).

According to the cognitive hypothesis, another metaphorical conceptual structure is at work here: TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY. Time is conceptualized as a limited and valuable resource both in Romanian and Anglo-American culture.

RESPONSIBILITY IS HOLDING IN THE HAND motivates the idiom *take somebody/something off somebody's hands* ('to take somebody's responsibility for something in order to give him/her the chance to have a rest').

COOPERATION IS HOLDING HANDS

- *go hand in hand with* has the Romanian counterparts: *a merge mână în mână* and *a fi mână în mână.*

English: *Youth* ***doesn't*** *usually* ***go hand in hand*** *with experience* (*LID*, 151).

Romanian: *Mă şi mir că nu v-aţi rupt gâtul până acum, sunteţi* ***mână-n mână*** *cu jandarmeria!* (Duda, G. et alii., 1985, 391).

- *work hand in hand with* has a Romanian equivalent expression: *a lucra mână în mână*.

English: *Wildlife conservation groups* ***have been working hand in hand*** *with the government to save the elephants* (*LID*, 152).

Romanian: *Au lucrat* ***mână în mână*** *şi acum vor trebui să răspundă împreună*.

The Romanian expression has a negative connotation.

FREEDOM TO ACT IS HAVING THE HANDS FREE



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- *give somebody a free hand* or *have a free hand.* There is an identical Romanian idiom*: a da cuiva mână liberă* or *a avea mână liberă*.

English: *The President relied on his personal secretary to make his life easier and **gives her a free hand** in arranging the details of his life (LID*, 151).

Romanian: *Şeful i-**a dat mână liberă** ca să rezolve problema*.

- *somebody's hands are tied* ('to prevent somebody from acting freely') has the following Romanian counterparts: *a avea mâinile legate; a fi cu mâinile legate; a lega (pe cineva) de mâini şi de picioare* (or *a lega, a fi legat de mâini şi de picioare*).

English: *We would like to grant Mrs. Maguire a pension but the law is very clear and our **hands are tied*** (*LID*, 153).

Romanian: *A doua zi, în zori, a mers cu noi la orezărie şi ne-a luat barca. Atât a fost de-ajuns ca **să ne lege de mâini şi de picioare*** (Duda, G. et alii., 1985, 335).

ATTENTION IS HOLDING IN THE HAND. Kövecses and Szabó (1996: 343) consider that this metaphor is likely to be a submetaphor of the more general one according to which the mind is regarded as some kind of workshop and mental activities as direct physical manipulation. Thus, attention is materialized through possession.

- *the matter at hand: **The matter at hand** was very important and difficult to solve.*

TO BE HONEST IS TO HAVE CLEAN HANDS represents the classical case of metaphor based on conventional knowledge. Thus, English idioms *have somebody's blood on your hands; have (got) clean hands* have a Romanian correspondent: *a avea mâinile curate.*

ETHICAL/MORAL IS UP and UNETHICAL/AMORAL IS DOWN

A relevant example is *to do something in an underhanded way* with the Romanian equivalent *a lua/ a da ceva pe sub mână*, where we have two cognitive sources, one for the lexeme *hand*, motivated by the metonymy THE HAND STANDS FOR ACTIVITY and another one for the lexeme *under*, motivated by the above orientational metaphor.

As we can notice, the conceptual metaphors together with metonymies and conventional knowledge link the concrete domains with the abstract ones. People conceptualize control, responsibility, freedom to act, possession and cooperation on the basis of the metaphorical extensions of the word *hand*. These metaphorical extensions have actually become lexicalized meanings of the word *hand*.

## 5. Conclusions

As can be seen from the previous analysis, the conceptualizations of the human *shoulder, arm* and *hand* depend on the conventional knowledge which we have about the placement, shape, and functions of these parts of our body and gestures connected with them. The other two cognitive mechanisms, conventional metaphor and metonymy play a relevant role in the way we store information about these body parts in our mind. Although there are many more idiomatic expressions both in English and Romanian which contain the lexemes *shoulder, arm* and *hand*, and which would require further and deeper analysis to confirm or reject the claim that the meaning of the constitutive parts of some idioms partially motivates their meaning, the previous examples prove that in many cases, this is valid.

This analysis shows that there is a considerable degree of correspondence between English and Romanian regarding these idioms. Thus, there are idiomatic expressions in both languages which share the same figurative meaning, as well as the same underlying conceptual strategies.



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Studying idioms across languages enables us to understand the way people think and gives us insights into human psychology. Although it is impossible to generalize with confidence about language in general, from a restricted analysis such as this one, the fact that cognitive mechanisms function in English and Romanian would suggest that metaphorical thinking may also function in other languages, too. The present study can also be a partial answer to the question whether or not we may speak about cross-cultural concepts within a common conceptual pattern. Cross-cultural and cross language similarity concerning *shoulder*, *arm* and *hand* idioms were, at least partially, demonstrated in our paper.

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