INTERCULTURAL METAPHORS IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN[1]

Teodora Popescu

Assoc. Prof., PhD, "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia

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

[1] *This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research and Innovation, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-RU-TE-2014-4-2785.*

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4004 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-22 16:11:35 UTC)

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,

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4004 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-22 16:11:35 UTC)

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 feminity, 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 Adevărul, 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

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4004 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-22 16:11:35 UTC)

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***hurtles* 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**

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4004 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-22 16:11:35 UTC)

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 **economie**i 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 **bani**i este precum politica Hexi Pharma

The monetary policy that dullutes money is like Hexi Pharma policy

2) Politica injecțiilor **monetare** nu este în mod direct criminală

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4004 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-22 16:11:35 UTC)

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 **money***saved* 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 occurences.

1) daca puneti pe hârtie directiile în care cheltuiti **bani**

If you write down the directions in which you spend money

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4004 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-22 16:11:35 UTC)

2) Vorbim de oameni care au pierdut **bani** masiv la bursa

We talk about people who have lost massively on the stock exchange

3) populația care strânge **bani** pierde și că fondurile private de pensii se află ...

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

4) alt cetăţean se duce cu încredere să împrumute acei bani, să îi folosească şi să îi dea înapoi

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

the value of money is unstable

1) Pentru ca *puterea de cumpărare* a **leului** să se schimbe este necesar să se întâmple ceva: să se modifice fie cererea de bani, fie oferta de bani, fie ambele.

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) Dacă cererea și oferta de bani rămân *constante*, atunci nimic nu se întâmplă cu valoarea **bani**lor.

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

3) oamenii nu sunt atât de proști încât să accepte **bani** indiferent de valoarea acestora; ei vor **bani** de o anumită putere de cumpărare

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

4) când BNR a tipărit cu nemiluita, valoarea **bani**lor a scăzut drastic

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

5) cu aceeasi suma de **bani** poti achizitiona din ce în ce mai putine bunuri

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

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4004 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-22 16:11:35 UTC)

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/.

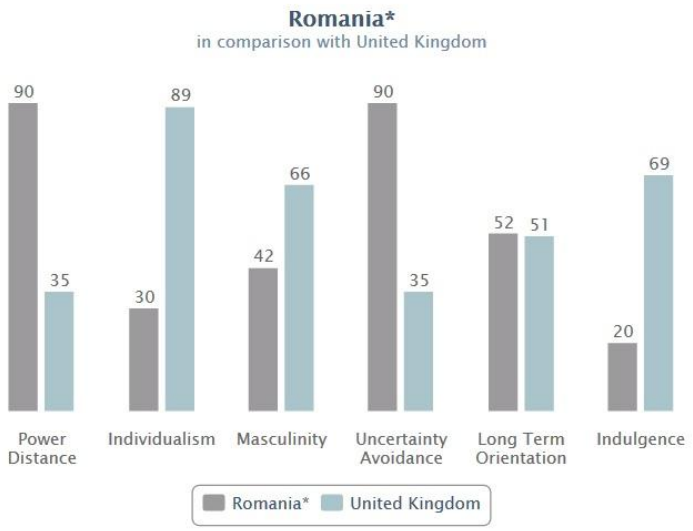


Fig. 1 Romania vs UK through the lens of the 6-D Model©

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

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4004 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-22 16:11:35 UTC)

(children are inculcated with thrifty behaviours – *bani albi pentru zile negre* – transl. *white money for black days*)

1) refuzul UE de a rambursa **bani**i *cheltuiti aiurea*
EU's refusal to reimburse the money spent carelessly
2) si *aruncând în foc* 20% din **bani**i colectati prin taxe
and burning 20% of the money collected through taxes
3) În acest context este o greșeală să *spargem***bani**i
In this context it is a mistake to (break) squander money
4) Principala cale de a *risipi***bani**i, 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 *toaca***bani** publici
That this is built by the very ones who (chop) squander public money
6) Daca **bani**i 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

Aitchison, J. (1994). *Words in the mind. An introduction to the mental lexicon* (2nd edition), Oxford: Blackwell.

Conceptual Metaphor Home Page (1994). Retrieved 12 February, 2016, from http://www.lang.osaka-u.ac.jp/~sugimoto/MasterMetaphorList/index.html.

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureș, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4004 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-22 16:11:35 UTC)

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.

Goddard, C., & Wierrzbicka, A. (1994). *Semantic and lexical universals: theory and empirical findings.* Amsterdam: J. Benjamins.

Herteg, C., & Popescu, T. (2013). Developing Business Students' Linguistic and Intercultural Competence through the Understanding of Business Metaphors. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *Volume 93, 21 October 2013*, Pages 1080-1084.

Hofstede, G. (1997). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind.* 1st edition, McGraw-Hill USA.

Jackendoff, R. (2007). *Language, Consciousness, Culture: Essays on Mental Structure*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Kachru B.B., & Kachane. H. (1995). *Cultures, Ideologies, and the Dictionary: Studies in Honour of Ladislav Zgusta*. Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.

Kövecses, Z. (2014). Where metaphors come from: Reconsidering context in metaphor. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: a practical introduction*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in Culture. Universality and variation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). Metaphors We Live by. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lakoff, G., & Turner, M. (1989). *More than cool reason: a field guide to poetic metaphor*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Popescu, T. (2012). Business Metaphors: A case study of Peugeot advertisements in different languages. *Journal of Linguistic and Intercultural Education - JoLIE*, 5/2012, 109-124.

Popescu, T. **(**2011). The Role of Culture in Business Communication. In L. Dragolea, M.I. Achim and J. Grabara, (Eds.), *Business Negotiation and Communication: Monograph* (pp. 82-97). Czestochowa University of Technology Faculty of Management, Czestochowa.

The Hofstede Centre ©. What about Romania? Retrieved 8 May, 2016, from https://geert-hofstede.com/romania.html.

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4004 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-22 16:11:35 UTC)

Wierzbicka, A. (1992). *Semantics, culture and cognition: universal human concepts in culture-specific configurations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wierzbicka, A. (1997). *Understanding cultures through their key words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Arhipelag XXI Press, Tîrgu Mureş, ISBN: 978-606-8624-03-7

BDD-V4004 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-22 16:11:35 UTC)