

A Sweet Deal: Loan-Translated Conceptual Metaphors of Food and Eating in Business Romanian

Ioana Gabriela Nan

Metaphor has a long history as a trope in rhetoric and literature, but it is its value as a conceptual tool that this article focuses on. After tracing their course from philosophy to cognitive linguistics, the article dwells on the most frequent metaphors in the business discourse in English and in Romanian before commenting on the influence of English on Romanian when it comes to neologisms in general and to the business idiom in particular, noting the significant number of English loan words impregnating the latter. The focal point of the article, however, is the category of cognitive metaphors adopted by this idiom in their loan translated form, especially those from the lexical field of food and eating. Although common in the English business discourse, these conceptual metaphors and their Romanian calqued equivalents are still less frequent and seem less adapted to the Romanian language system, despite the readiness with which business journalists and businesspeople themselves seem to have appropriated them.

Metaphor; conceptual metaphor; food-related metaphor; loan word; calque; neologism; business discourse.

I. Metaphor, from philosophy to cognition

Metaphor, whose name derives from the Greek *meta*, meaning “change” and *pherein*, meaning “to carry”, is a figure of speech well-known to classical rhetoric. Aristotle defined it in his *Poetics* as a trope related to simile in its reliance on – as Derrida describes it – “the magnetic attraction of the similar” between two concepts (Derrida, 1982, p. 215). Quintilian further refined this definition, positing it as the most common (*frequentissimus*) and by far the most beautiful (*longe pulcherrimus*) trope (Novokhatko, 2017, p. 311), a gift from nature that we frequently use, sometimes unknowingly. Moreover, in the Latin rhetor’s view, metaphor is entrusted with a supremely important role – that of ensuring that nothing goes without a name (*praestat ne ulli rei nomen deesse videatur*) (Donoghue, 2014). Lautréamont, the nineteenth century French poet and precursor of the surrealist movement, noted as

“an extraordinary thing [...] that force of attraction which leads us to search out [...] to express the likenesses and differences that lie hid in the natural properties of objects that are quite disparate, and quite unsuited in appearance to take part in this kind of sympathetically curious combination”. (Derrida, 1982, p. 258)

Derrida himself contributes the essential observation that, as far as philosophy is concerned, metaphor is much more than a language trope, in that it “is less in the philosophical text [...] than the philosophical text is within it” (Derrida, 1982, p. 258), thus emphasising, in line with Quintilian, the cognitive value of metaphor as far beyond that of a simple figure of speech.

The semiotic quality of metaphor resides in the fact that it is “the trope of resemblance between two signs, one of which designates the other” (Derrida, 1982, p. 215), while semantically speaking, the metaphoric quality of a word or locution the effect of one domain of reference being carried over onto another domain of reference, based on a perception of similarity between the two fields (Wales, 2001). In the 1755 definition of Samuel Johnson’s dictionary, it is “a simile comprised in a word”. As for the truth value of metaphor in comparison with that of a simile, “while all similes are (trivially) true, most metaphors are (patently) false” (Davidson, 1978, p. 42). However, despite the fact that they obviously flout Grice’s maxim of quality concerning truthfulness, this is accepted as a matter of convention, probably because some relation of similarity is borne in mind that retains an element of truth in the metaphor. Paradoxically then, despite their obvious falseness when taken literally, the economical word choice at play in metaphors helps us think in concrete terms about abstract notions (Fairhurst, 1996).

That very quality explains why these compressed similes have expanded their scope beyond the domain of literary art, where it’s been known as one of the most frequent defamiliarising techniques outlining the extra-ordinary nature of literary language - its literariness, as the Formalists called it. Almost in reversal of that narrow view, metaphor has sparked renewed interest on the part of linguists and neuroscientists as a basic element of cognition that helps us make sense of the world by structuring the way we think and experience it. That metaphors are in fact so common in our everyday speech that “we live by” them is an idea already present in Quintilian, but taken up with its most productive consequences for linguistic research by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their book of 1980 and in other subsequent research by the authors (such as, for instance, Lakoff’s *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things* from 1987 or Johnson’s *The Body in the Mind*, published in the same year). According to them, our language use is so impregnated with metaphor that “it’s hard to find expressions for abstract ideas that are *not* metaphorical” (Steven Pinker, 2008, p. 15). To speak metaphorically does not mean using special words,

but expanding the meanings of already familiar ones by making analogies that are no longer literal but implied, or figurative (Fairhurst, 1996) between two objects that have no apparent thing in common. The dependence of human thought on metaphor is explained by the fact that it allows us to understand complex new concepts in relation to familiar, everyday things by acting as guides to our conceptual probing of new territories (Haidt, 2006). Going against the myth of linguistic objectivity espoused by logical positivism, Lakoff and Johnson see metaphor as essential, pervasive and primary to human reasoning, so much so that the authors call certain kind of metaphors “ontological”, that is, basic to understanding our experience (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

Conceptual metaphors, as defined by Lakoff and Johnson, are mechanisms by which we understand one concept (usually an abstract one) in terms of another (usually more concrete). For example, the way we typically think about disagreements and discussions is usually expressed linguistically in the metaphor “argument is war”, which, in turn reinforces, by a sort of mental shortcut, the way we conceptualise verbal disagreement. So, understanding a concept through metaphor presupposes mapping some defining aspects of a “source domain”, usually concrete, (i.e., war, a journey) onto a “target domain”, usually abstract (i.e., argument, love). In this way, we draw on our knowledge of the source domain to comprehend the target domain (Lakoff, 1980). By extension, an entire culture can be construed as a conceptual system shaped by specific metaphors. While our common humanity may determine many common conceptual metaphors (for instance, those related to the body, or to location in space), there are some conceptual metaphors that are culturally specific, such as “time is money”, expressing a certain attitude to time that may be specific to capitalist, individualist societies like the Western ones (Lakoff, 1980).

Formulating new scientific theories in different domains means constantly attempting to formulate and expand a consistent set of cognitive metaphors (Lakoff, 1980). If any new scientific paradigm, as a new scientific model of the world, generates its own metaphors, in business, too, the metaphors in use are indicative of the current theories in circulation and of the mindset of the speaking businesspeople, probably playing a role in their subsequent decisions and actions (Clancy, 1999), not least because, by using a consistent set of cognitive metaphors, reality can be rendered more coherent and more predictable (Lakoff, 1980). In this sense, certain sets on conceptual metaphors may govern their thought, the ideas and images conjured in their minds similar to the “invisible powers” referred to by John Locke in his essay on how the workings of reason (Locke, 1697).¹

¹ The power of conceptual metaphor to simplify thought can also represent an ideological danger, in the sense that framing a phenomenon by a certain metaphor may discourage or distort other reasoning perspectives. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis indicates that the language we speak does shape our view of the world, and that is perhaps also true for the metaphors we choose to employ in any field of study or professional domain.

In the wake of Lakoff's revealing insights into conceptual metaphor, cognitive stylistics became a significantly productive area of research as scholars began to take note of the frequency of conceptual metaphors in all types of discourse, including the discourse of business and economics, their work leading to notable findings in the latter field, especially in the science of business organisations (Gareth Morgan 1986; Grant and Osrick 1996). For example, Morgan's eight metaphors for organisations (as a machine, organism, brain, culture, political system, psychic prison, flux and transformation, instrument of domination) provided insight into the ways managers can understand and shape organisational life, while also drawing attention to the fact that a theory of metaphor has both explaining and distorting power (Morgan, 2006).

2. Cognitive metaphor and the business discourse

My particular interest was in the type and frequency of economic metaphor as reflected in publications popularising the field of business and economy. In this respect, the two research articles I have analysed (Eva Kovacs 2006; Maria Lopez Maestre 2000), based on corpora in British publications of which two are general information newspapers (*The Times*, *The Guardian Weekly*) and one is a well-known magazine specialised in economic and business journalism (*The Economist*), report very similar findings. According to these, the most frequent conceptual metaphors seem to be - in order of their frequency, as reported by Maria Lopez Maestre, and with examples I have found myself, confirming their high usage frequency: business is fight/war: "The coming battle for customer information"; business is a journey: "Center paves way for using waste in building highways"; business is a living organism/a human body: "A [...] poll found that [people] agree that the economy is in bad shape"; business is a natural phenomenon: "Some [...] economists argue that the economy will soon overheat"; "the economy is being flooded with too much money". Other less frequent metaphors, but by no means rare, imply that business is a game/sport/play: "The new winners and losers in business" or that business can be seen as a marriage institution: "Making a corporate marriage work".

The vast majority of conceptual metaphors accounted for in these examples seem to be conceptual metaphors of a structural kind, with one domain of reference structured in terms of another, even if there is also a large category of spatial metaphors as well, where one of the domains is structured by means of a particular image-schema (e.g. up-down; in-out; source-path-goal) (Lopez Maestre, 2000). The variations are due to the extent of the research (in the first case, several issues of the publications, in the other, several decades' worth of data) and the elements taken into account (while one researcher studied the content of articles, the other only took into account the conceptual metaphors present in headlines). However, the findings of the two researchers coincide with those of other authors who were struck by the flood of metaphors and analogies usually employed in business ("war, organisms, societies, games, journeys") (Clancy, 1999, p. 1).

When it comes to the Romanian business discourse, Corina Dobrotă (2005) analyses different types of conceptual metaphor and their linguistic actualisation in the articles of a number of economic newspapers, studying the systematicity of metaphors and their organisation into hierarchical structures, but also to highlighting the linguistic actualization of the conceptual metaphors typical to economic discourse in Romanian. As expected, she explains the fact that the development of modelling structures to interpret economic phenomena is almost exclusively Anglo-American by the economic sway these nations hold on the global economy. Despite changes in the world economic order, she notes that English has preserved, and even reinforced, its linguistic dominance in the business/economic discourse, hence the crosslinguistic similarity of the conceptual metaphors in this particular kind of discourse found in a language such as Spanish, for example, as revealed by a comparative study (Charteris-Black, 2001). According to Dobrotă, although it is sometimes possible to trace back the origin of some of these conceptual metaphors to American English and to note their loan translation in many languages (e.g. *money laundering* in Romanian, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Slovenian), what is most often transferred is the concept and not necessarily its linguistic actualisation. Quite in line with the previous two studies mentioned in connection with conceptual metaphors in business English, although using other classification criteria, Dobrotă also mentions two most frequent upper-order categories of metaphor in business Romanian (“Economy is an organism” and “Economic contraction is a natural disaster”), with numerous subcategories each, many of these corresponding to the categories of conceptual metaphor found by Kovacs and Lopez Maestre.

On the other hand, the comparative research method employed by Anca Pecican (2007) looks at the frequency of use of conceptual metaphors in English and Romanian reports by central banks, finding that conceptual metaphors occur more frequently in the English documents than in the Romanian ones, although the categories of conceptual metaphors are roughly the same, dominated by structural conceptual metaphors of economy as a living organism, with Romanian financial discourse less prone to employing conflict-related metaphors (Pecican 2007) than its English equivalent. Interestingly enough, the two Romanian authors referred to so far do not find or mention any cases in which conceptual metaphors may have found their linguistic realisation in the Romanian reports by means of loan translation from English, noting only that the matching types of metaphor across the two languages are most frequent in terms of both concept and linguistic expression (Pecican, 2007).

3. Business cognitive metaphors as neologisms in loan translation

My own findings seem to show that the popularity of English among Romanian business professionals and the massive import of new concepts in this field of Romanian culture seem to have made it easier and more common for speakers to loan translate the

conceptual metaphors of English whenever these did not appear to have a linguistic equivalent in Romanian, and often even when they might have one, thus introducing many calqued neologisms into the language.

A calque is the name given to the word-for-word translation of words or phrases borrowed from English (Brown, 2013) or other languages. Loan-translating in this way is like walking in the footsteps of another language (considering the Latin origin of the word – *calcare*, “to tread”), or like tracing and replicating another language’s meanings in one’s own (from the French *calquer* (vb.), *calque* (n.)). The English synonym “loan translation” is relatively newer in usage (1930-1935, according to the *Collins* dictionary). While the value of neologisms by calque is undoubtful, especially when the host language does not have any established equivalents to express new concepts, many Romanian researchers nowadays discuss the phenomenon of extensive borrowings (Chirilă, 2014) and especially of loan translation from English in relation to the often badly formed neologisms adopted by Romanian speakers as half-baked translations (Manea, 2020), noting the unnecessarily high frequency of loan translations as an intermediate form by which English-origin neologisms enter the contemporary Romanian lexis (Dragomirescu, 2011; Manea, 2017). While in the case of the majority of researches mentioned here the attitude to the phenomenon, though not purist, is clearly and overwhelmingly negative – with descriptions such as “misplaced efforts”, a “latter-day *langue du bois*”, “stilted, politically correct indirectness”, “a ludicrous result” (Manea, 2017, p. 90) summing up their response - others remain cautiously non-committal, trusting the Romanian language to self-regulate in the long run by getting rid of the most obvious excesses of this kind (Dragomirescu, 2011).

The massive wave of neologisms of English origin in Romanian, at first through French, is a phenomenon of the 19th century that intensified throughout the 20th century (Chirilă, 2014) and is now so common as to give birth to the derogatory term “Romglish”. Numerous books and articles have been dedicated to commenting on and analysing the inclination of Romanian speakers to adopt words of English origin, sometimes to the clear detriment of lexical items and structures consolidated by long usage, thus reinforcing the perception that such badly formed lexical structures, fully or partially translated, deserve the derogatory “barbarism” status (Dragomirescu, 2011; Manea, 2017; Manea, 2020). Although a good degree of this kind of “foreignization” is correlated to the corresponding degree of expertise – or lack thereof - of Romanian translators (Manea, 2020), there are professional areas whose status symbol seems to be marked by the wholehearted (or wholesale) adoption of English as a sort of professional *lingua franca* where an otherwise legitimate regard for the norms of one’s mother tongue seem to be trumped by the need to demonstrate one’s level of professional expertise by subservience to English, in this case. The phenomenon, including other languages as well, was noted and criticised at earlier moments as well, with Al. Graur spotting language mistakes in Romanian that

generalize and finally replace those forms that are established and historically correct. His explanation is that specialists in various fields create erroneous terms because they lack language education (Gaur, 1982). Besides signalling these mistakes, he tries to contribute to reestablishing the correct form from the point of view of the origin of the word because, as he sees it, not in every case “do we need to just give up fighting” (Gaur, 1982, p. 12).

Economics has been outlined as one of the professional areas where English loan words, either adapted to the grammar norms or not, have been most readily adopted, signalling either the speakers’ level of professionalism (especially in relation to the latest trends in finance, marketing (Redeş, 2017), management (Redeş, 2018), tourism or property development, for instance) or a level of familiarity with English that constitutes, in itself, a sign of education and carries a connotation of prestige - from semantic ennoblement in advertising to linguistic snobbery in everyday business parlance (Dragomirescu, 2011) - which might explain, to some extent, the speakers’ preference for the English terms, and perhaps their refusal to use an already existing equivalent in their mother tongue (Chirilă, 2014). A certain inferiority complex that Romanians are still trying to shake, perhaps connected to the long period of communist isolationism, might also explain their constant gravitation towards the most prestigious and powerful language of the moment, which they may perceive as allowing them to access the latest trends in the wider world in order to tap into its resources of information and wealth. Perhaps that is why, however “substantial, abundant and even plethorically aggressive” (Manea, 2017, p. 90), “Englishing” and “Anglomania” (Manea, 2017, p. 90) may be, considering the relentless demand for globalization and economic competitiveness, the phenomenon seems set to continue. Romanian researchers have been quick to note and point out the advantages and disadvantages of this linguistic trend (Redeş, 2017, 2018; Chirilă, 2014; Alibec, 2018) by analysing the phenomenon as it appears in Romanian dictionaries (Redeş, 2017, 2018) or in business magazines such as *Capital* (see Chirilă 2004, who notes the extent to which Romanian companies have adopted English names).

4. An empirical study of food-related business metaphors in loan translation

The examples I have found are taken from three consecutive issues of the printed edition of the Romanian bi-monthly publication *Business Magazin*, a 66-page long magazine published both in print and online. These particular issues were published in print between August and September 2020. Besides the editorial, the sections of each issue cover subjects related to various topics of interest to businesspeople, economists and entrepreneurs, such as real estate, entrepreneurship, business ideas and business analysis, international business news and opinions. Most of the stories in the magazine are articles, but there are also a number of interviews with professionals. All these texts have provided an empirical corpus of more than 200 examples of lexical structures (both loanwords and conceptual metaphors in loan translation) that reveal the outstanding

degree of linguistic mapping between Romanian and English when it comes to business-related loanwords in general and to loan translations of cognitive metaphors in particular.

One of the less obvious categories of metaphor employed in business, or at least one that hasn't been pointed out by the above-mentioned researchers as standing out in terms of frequency, is the group of cognitive metaphors related to food and eating. It seems natural for these metaphors to have been imported into the business idiom, given the fact that "edible idioms and metaphors" appear to be so widely used across languages and cultures, with as many as seventeen languages found to yield illustrative examples (Mindess, 2012). English itself is rich in such metaphors ("a couch potato", "the apple of one's eye"), and their matter-of-course use in the discourse of business has not gone unnoticed by Romanian researchers either ("to cook the books", "strategic recipes", "half-baked sales") (Nicolae, 2007), but fewer researchers seem to have noted the extent to which these food-related metaphors from English – or from other languages via English – have penetrated the Romanian business idiom as loan translations. Here are some examples found in the Romanian business magazine mentioned above:

1. "idei *proaspete* de afaceri" (< Engl. *fresh* ideas). The adjective "fresh" is usually used in English a meaning "new, different, exciting", with collocations such as "fresh instructions/evidence/ look/start/insights/approach and business English providing many examples of its use ("fresh data", "fresh start", "a breath of fresh air"), but in Romanian the adjectives normally used to describe business ideas would probably be "nou/inovator". The marketing industry and idiom is probably responsible for having made the adjective very frequent in the Romanian business language, sometimes without translation, as in "un look fresh".
2. "(bănci care) *au absorbit* (alte entități financiar-bancare)" (< Engl. banks *absorb* other banks, banks *absorb* shock, as in "banks can *absorb* banks outside their MBHC"). The metaphor can be found in other Romanian business media outlets as well, for instance in *Ziarul Financiar*: "O companie ... *a absorbit* producătorul ...". In Romanian, the most natural verb would probably have been a "a prelua/a încorporează" to transfer the meaning of the English "to absorb", which is "to take control" in this context.
3. "*apetitul* românilor pentru vacanțe/pentru locuintele urbane" (< Engl. *appetite for*, such as in the collocation "*appetite for* riskier investments", for example). In this case, it is difficult to establish whether the loan translation into Romanian comes via French ("l'appétit pour les investissements/pour le risque") or directly from English, but the cognitive metaphor itself seems to be of English origin calqued into French, according to the Canadian government's *Banque de dépannage linguistique*, and in fact considered inappropriate usage.

4. “guvernul, ... *stropit din belșug cu finanțarea de la UE*” (< Engl. *richly sprinkled with*, as in “student bodies *richly sprinkled with* National Merit Scholars”, or “Nuggets of data are *richly sprinkled* throughout the book”. In English, to sprinkle means “to drop a few drops of sth over a surface”, and it can be used figuratively, as in “a speech liberally sprinkled with innuendos”. However, in Romanian the metaphor does not usually apply to business. It is common in contexts that allow its literal, kitchen-related, meaning to come forth, as in “weekend *stropit din belșug cu alcool*”.
5. “businessuri ... care „*condimentează*” o piață” (< Engl. businesses that *spice up* a market). Besides its literal meaning, the English verb “to spice sth up” can also be used figuratively to mean “adding excitement or interest to something). However, the unusual usage in Romanian of the equivalent calqued metaphor is clearly considered foreign by the writer himself/herself, hence the inverted commas signalling its uncommon meaning as a metaphor in a business-related context, when the Romanian verb is strictly used with its literal meaning of “a da gust mâncării prin adăugare de condimente”.
6. “Financial Times are o *poveste mai aromată* despre...” (< Engl. *a spicy story*). The English metaphor is commonly used to refer to narratives that are interesting or exciting particularly because they contain a shocking element, or because they deal with intimate matters (“a spicy novel/details”). However, in the Romanian business context the calque appears contrived, since the Romanian adjective “aromat” simply means “cu aromă, parfumat” and does not connote the above-mentioned metaphorical meanings in the same context. On the other hand, in a headline such as “Poveste *aromată* de business”, the adjective is used as an authentic metaphor in the Romanian context considering that the corresponding article is about setting up a coffee shop. In this case, we are not talking about a calque from English as far as the metaphor is concerned, even though we can speak about the clumsy calque “poveste de business”, from the English “business story”.
7. “*oferte îndulcite* de la guvernele anterioare” (< Engl. *sweetened offers/to sweeten an offer*). As far as the verb in the active form is concerned, Romanian and English both use it metaphorically with similar meanings. Thus, the meanings of “a domoli, a estompa”, but also “a face mai puțin aspru/dur/violent” (as in “a îndulci glasul/durerea”) are comparable to the English meaning of “making something more attractive” (“to sweeten news/a deal/the pill”). However, the metaphoric meaning is highly uncommon in the Romanian business context. Moreover, in Romanian, the past participle of the verb

(“indulcit/ă”) only carries the literal meaning of “blând, domol”, which makes the calque from English even more obvious.

5. Conclusion

An inexhaustible resource of novelty in the process of “translating” the world into language, metaphor is also an indicator of thought processes that we are more or less aware of in everyday life, but that can either narrow down, or expand, the ways in which we think about our personal or work-related circumstances. In business as in other professional areas, cognitive metaphors represent a significant part of the idiom, noticed and analysed by linguists and economists alike. What is surprising for the purpose of this article is how many of the conceptual business metaphors inherent to English have been readily adopted in loan translation by other languages, and by Romanian in particular. Here, despite the frequently negative associations of English cognitive metaphors with badly translated neologisms, businesspeople seem to have promptly embraced them, perhaps in an effort to display familiarity with the idiom of the profession. On the other hand, calques of cognitive metaphors associated to food and eating are less frequent in the Romanian business discourse in comparison with English, and the special consideration given to them here underlines the way in which the structures of the Romanian language struggle to accommodate unfamiliar ways of thinking by rendering them (imperfectly) familiar, in a paradoxical reversal of the way in which metaphor classically defines itself.

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Assistant Lecturer Ioana-Gabriela Nan, Ph.D. She is a member of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication within the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Her main areas of interest are: literature and literary journalism, the philosophy of literature, discourse analysis, language-teaching in higher education. (ioana.nan@econ.ubbcluj.ro)