Cultural Branding Models in English and Romanian Proverbs. A Conceptual Metaphoric Analysis

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to decode cultural differences, as well as specific national brands in terms of linguistic projections of cultural identities. The paper finds its place in the series of discourse analyses which apply linguistic and cultural theories to different texts. However, the novelty of this work resides in its use of the latest linguistic trend – cognitive semantics – as its most important apparatus as well as the application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory to English proverbs by following the theoretical cognitive-semantic studies of George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, Gilles Fauconnier and others.

Starting from the premise that a brand is a particular product made by a company exactly as language is the cultural tool of a society, the paper proposes an interpretation of proverbs as cultural branding products. Proverbs are rich sources of cultural models which speak about the national identity of a society. Moreover, proverbs may be interpreted as cultural signs which convey moral lessons to be learned from certain events or happenings. The metaphorical images that we perceive while interpreting proverbs help us interpret similar situations.

Keywords: proverbs, cognitive linguistics, cultural branding, cultural models, identity, conceptual metaphors

1. Introduction

Cognitive linguists such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Collins & Smith (1988) and Gentner & Goldin Meadow (2003) or Kövecses (2010, 2015) prove that the easiest method of exploring the descriptive and exploratory potential of language is by mapping aspects of a previously known and well-delineated *source* domain onto a newer and less structured *target* domain. It is this relationship of resemblance between two separate domains that facilitates the conceptual structuring of one domain in terms of another. In this manner, the unknown may be experienced in terms of other concepts that are concrete and more accessible to our comprehension and, eventually, things are easier to remember.

The moral lessons transmitted by proverbs teach us that absence is experienced in terms of affection, that health is experienced in terms of healthy eating and good sleep, or that patience and prudence lead to wealth or other examples which are illustrated in the analysis. Although proverbs are useful guideposts based on various everyday practice, in reality, their message never replaces actual experience.

As the research paper focuses on conceptual metaphor analysis of proverbs perceived as cultural brands, cultural studies is a compulsory domain, as it combines communication with sociology, social theory, literary theory, philosophy, as well as cultural anthropology and even art history in order to study cultural phenomena and their representations in various societies. The most important aspects of cultural studies concern the relations between cultural phenomena and ideological issues.

2. Theoretical background

The authors of this scientific endeavour rely on a prominent theme in cognitive semantics, which is the idea of conceptual mappings. This linguistic theoretical approach represents the core methodology of the research, which is mainly supported by cultural studies and branding theories, so as to reveal a pertinent opinion on the linguistic analysis of the selected English proverbs.

Thus, according to Fauconnier (1997), there are three kinds of mapping operations which the researcher has identified in his Mappings in Thought and Language, and these are: projection mappings, pragmatic function mappings and schema mappings. A projection mapping projects structure from one domain (source) onto another (target). Pragmatic function mappings occur between two entities on the basis of a shared frame of experience, where conceptual structure is embodied, semantic structure is conceptual structure, which means that representation is encyclopaedic and meaning construction is conceptualisation. The first principle that has emerged in order to explain the nature of conceptual organisation on the basis of interaction with the physical world is called the embodied cognition thesis. This thesis stipulates that the nature of conceptual organisation comes from bodily experience, which makes conceptual structure become meaningful by the association with that particular bodily experience. Thus, concepts are associated and the result is an instance of what cognitive linguists call an image schema. In the cognitive model, the image-schematic concept represents one of the ways in which bodily experience gives rise to meaningful concepts and turns the abstract into more concrete so it may be understood.

The second principle claims that language refers to concepts in the speaker's mind rather than to objects in the outer world. These conventional meanings associated with words are linguistic concepts or lexical concepts. They represent the conventional form that is required by conceptual structure so as to be encoded in the language. However, the claim that semantic structure can be equated with conceptual structure does not mean that the two are identical. On the contrary, cognitive semanticists assert that words and meanings together form only a subset of possible concepts. Cognitive semantics, therefore, leads the way to bind the opposing extremes of subjectivism and the objectivism of traditional truth-conditional semantics by affirming that concepts relate to lived experience.

The third central principle of cognitive semantics holds that semantic structure is encyclopaedic in nature. This means that words do not represent chunks of meaning as it appears in dictionaries, but serve as "points of access" (Langaker 1987) to vast repositories of knowledge relating to a particular concept or conceptual domain. We "construct" a meaning by "selecting" a meaning that is appropriate in the context of the utterance.

Therefore, following the encyclopaedic nature concept, this study also makes use of the vast domain of cultural studies, in order to support the semantic analysis. When defining cultural studies, one must begin with Richard Hoggart and continue with Stuart Hall, Antonio Gramsci and others. The domain of cultural studies was from the very beginning interested in knowledge and ideas and culture as part of the entire possible accomplishments of humankind. According to John Hartley,

culture, knowledge, theory, ideas and – after Foucault – power itself, were not scarce at all, but plentiful, and part of the project of cultural studies was to study and practise not just the traditional aesthetics and pursuits of the governors, but to include in and as culture as much as possible, indeed everything – the whole way of life of a people. Cultural studies was a philosophy of plenty, of inclusion, and of renewal. (Hartley 2003: 3)

According to Chris Baker and Dariusz Galasinski (2001), cultural studies has for some time been an integral part of the linguistic turn in the humanities and social sciences, as writers have constantly argued that language is the central means and medium by which we understand the world and construct culture. Their conclusion is that the contemporary emphasis given to language within cultural studies is itself a part of a wider cultural turn that is constituted in two ways.

First, culture is explored through its own specific mechanisms

and logic without reduction to any other phenomenon (e.g. the mode of production). Second, facets of a social formation that had previously been considered to be quite separate from culture can themselves be understood as cultural. (idem:1)

According to Chris Baker, discourse, identities and social practice within time and space are connected to cultural politics and define humanity as a form of life. Identities are constructed within the everyday flow of language and later established as categories according to our social construct.

Thus, the claim that language is constitutive of identity is not simply an abstract philosophical one, but is an argument located in the everyday social conversations of ordinary life. In carrying out rituals and activities within social relationships people use a language that does not acquire its significance from individual mental states. (idem: 44)

Last but not least, the research focuses on cultural branding, a field that has evolved from marketing research when the attention shifted from brand producers and products to consumer response. This has resulted in a cultural perspective upon brands and branding, which has to take into account all the elements converging towards the definition of society, namely its historical context, the ethical and moral concerns, its representations, national core values, ethnic components, ideological and political inclinations. Therefore, relying on the typical branding concepts - equity, strategy and value - we can state that proverbs may act both as a national identification card from a socio-psychological point of view, as well as national brand to be known and promoted to other nationalities. Cultural branding is a form of national branding, which concerns a country's image on the international market. However, there is a great difference between cultural branding and cultural brand, where cultural branding refers to the act of defining a culture with the purpose of promotion, while cultural brand is related to the concept of identity and outside perception of that particular culture. Simon Anholt considers a nation brand as "the most valuable asset: it is national identity made robust, tangible, communicable, and – at its best – made useful". Therefore, cultural brand, or nation brand is strictly related to national identity, as

the identity and image of the places we inhabit are really a seamless extension of the identity and image of ourselves; it is a natural human tendency for people to identify themselves with their city, region or country. (Anholt 2010: 157)

3. The linguistic analysis

Proverbs are frequently used in daily speech as they express key understandings about everyday life. On a general scale, proverbs are complex and reflect the wisdom of a culture. Their correct decoding relies on metaphorical perception, which is also imperative for second language learners in the process of translation. Their linguistic connotations meet the aesthetic ones with which they associate and combine. The meanings depicted by a proverb are linked through mutual abstract ideas. When it is isolated, the metaphor of such an abstract idea creates microcontexts. In some of these, words get connotative value. A wide range of proverbs have a core term that gets new connotations. Proverbs presuppose a metaphoric statement because, beyond the truth emphasized through images, it constitutes the target of the person that reproduces it.

Not all proverbs are metaphorical. Rosamund Moon argues that proverbs comprise traditional maxims with deontic functions (cf. Moon 1998: 26). The linguist considers that metaphorical proverbs can be distinguished from the non-metaphorical ones. The metaphorical proverbs are of the type: *you can't have your cake and eat it,* while the non-metaphorical ones are of the type *first come first served.* However, some non-metaphorical proverbs have also gained popularity. The

preference for metaphorical proverbs lies in the fact that they can be employed in a figurative or indirect way as verbal folklore based on indirection.

Our corpus is not intended to be either exhaustive or representative of the full range of English and Romanian proverbs, but to ensure a relevant semantic analysis of the way in which people respond to a range of problematic situations. The examples have been classified according to the conceptual metaphors they contain and interpreted from a cognitive linguistic perspective. The way people generally conceive a certain situation is influenced by various factors such as: character, education, morality, perception of life, in short, the specificity of a culture. Proverbs presuppose a complex passing from the particular to the general, and then, back to the particular, but on a larger scale. That is why they are short and concise, but, at the same time, offer enough details for a succinct interpretation of a certain situation. Thus, they may be viewed as short lessons about particular situations that take place in our lives. The cultural models/markers emphasize the general truths depicted in proverbs on the basis of cognitive perception.

English proverb	Romanian equivalent
Absence makes the heart grow fonder.	Mai răruț, mai drăguț.
Out of sight, out of mind.	Ochii care nu se văd se uită.
Faint heart never won fair lady.	Cine nu îndrăznește nu cucerește.

Table 1. *Love metaphors in proverbs*

At a first glance, analysing the love metaphors in the proverbs mentioned above, we notice the antithesis concerning the popular belief in matters of the heart, where distance is involved with the saying *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*, versus the other somehow elliptical saying *Out of sight, out of mind*. On the one hand, absence (or distance) is enhanced by the semantic markers of the adverb *fond*

[+AFFECTION, +ENTHUSIASM, +OPTIMISM], which are even increased by the comparative form of the adverb fonder. The conceptual metaphor deriving from this analysis is ABSENCE IS AFFECTION. On the other hand, in the second proverb, distance is the subject of forgetfulness, given by the semantic markers of the prepositional phrase out of [+EXCLUSION, +ELIMINATION, +REMOVAL]. That is to say, DISTANCE IS FORGETFULNESS becomes the conceptual metaphor mapped by the second association of terms. Despite the contradiction of opinions both the English folklore expressions and the Romanian counterparts of these proverbs support the opposite ideas - one which increases love with the absence of one's lover, the other, by decreasing the feeling of love, due to physical distance. From a stylistic point of view, rhyme and alliteration are frequently used in proverbs and bring the advantage of remembering and perpetuating them. Other examples are somehow elliptical as in the case of *out of sight, out of mind*.

In the case of Faint heart never won fair lady, there is a similar understanding of the concept of cowardice. Both British and Romanian cultures perceive courtship as accompanied by the courage to conquer. This idea is projected by the negative form of the sentence related to the idea of cowardice in both languages. Thus, the subject on the sentence faint heart, with its semantic markers [-COURAGE, +FEAR, +NERVOUSNESS] never won [-VICTORY] and, in the Romanian proverb, He who dares not, conquers not, the same semantic markers are revealed [-COURAGE, -VICTORY]. Therefore, the metaphor conveyed by these proverbs is FAINT HEART IS A LOSER. As a result, the cultural stereotype of courage imposes itself in both national identities. Sometimes, proverbs may deliver a pessimistic lesson. Maybe too much fear has led to cowardice and the proverb wants to state exactly the opposite. In other instances, proverbs may mislead on purpose. Two similar variants of proverbs dealing with the same topic deliver a more optimistic message: The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear or Courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. So, maybe if we had interpreted the entire proverb metaphorically, we could have interpreted it viceversa. He who wants to succeed shall not be defeated – this is the cultural model which shapes tough characters that belong to these two nations nowadays. It is true that courage does not signal the absence of fear but sometimes we have to face our own fears. Both cultures promote the idea of courage propelled by ambition, while fear may be interpreted in terms of prudence and not cowardice, because courage is, in fact, an act of bravery. Thus, we may say that, with the passing of time, people have continually evolved, the difficulties have changed and people have learnt how to cope with fear and, similarly, the cultural stereotype has changed the general truth we once knew and the situation has turned to our advantage.

English proverb	Romanian translation	Romanian proverb
An apple a day keeps the doctor away.	Un măr pe zi de doctor te va feri.	Lucrul și cumpătul închid ușa medicului. ¹
Live not to eat but eat to	Mănâncă pentru a trăi și	Omul nu trăiește ca să
live.	nu trăi pentru a mânca.	mănânce, ci mănâncă ca
	•	să trăiască. ²
Early to bed, early to rise,	Sculatul şi culcatul	Cine se trezește
makes a man healthy,	devreme te mențin în	devreme departe
wealthy and wise.	formă.	ajunge. ³

 Table 2. Health metaphors in proverbs

In terms of health preservation, both British and Romanian mappings of the target domain to the source one are related to the folk wisdom according to which fruit and vegetables consumption leads to a healthy life due to minerals and vitamins intake. This also

¹ Note that a possible (personal) translation would be: Work and balance keep the doctor away.

² Man does not live to eat but eats to stay alive.

³ He who wakes up earlier gets further.

corresponds to the more recent obsession with weight loss that equals to a healthier attitude towards life. Therefore, the proverb conveys the conceptual metaphor FRUIT IS HEALTH. The cultural model underlined by this conceptual metaphor is that of a balanced diet. *An apple a day keeps the doctor away* is a proverb specific to British culture but the message the proverb delivers may be familiar to many cultures and people, which means that the cultural models from one culture may be transferred to another. An apple implies health benefits, so, by eating apples on a regular basis we could not catch a cold that often.

In the Romanian culture, there is also the concept of balance, but in terms of measure. We could not find a proverb with the exact meaning but an archaic one with a similar meaning could be translated as *work and balance keep the doctor away*⁴. Working and having a balanced attitude towards everything we do leads to a healthy life. This proverb also contains a somewhat hidden message for those who do not take this lesson seriously and have a lazy existence. Proverbs speak about our identity in different ways and it is only through language that we can get a truer understanding of our selves.

Food is undoubtedly the most primitive form of comfort. But what some call healthy food, other may call tedious disease in which case we might experience exactly the opposite: *Healthy food makes me sick*. In this case, food may be seen in terms of personal choice. It is an important part of our identity and helps us stay healthy or not, it helps us socialize when going out, it helps us close deals when *a dinner lubricates business*. The conceptual metaphor emphasized in the previous example would be FOOD IS BUSINESS which means that, besides nurturing us, food gives meaning, order and value to our lives. These concepts prove that, given the relationship of synonymy between proverbs, there is the possibility for some proverbs to be subsumed under more semantic areas. In fact, the insights offered by the proverbs or by the cultural models they contain depend on the

 $^{^4}$ Lucrul și cumpătul închid ușa medicului.

context of use. *Prevention is better than cure – Paza bună trece primejdia rea*⁵ come to strengthen the same idea of promoting health through prudence.

Proverbs stated as sentences may provide contexts that strongly impose possible inferences and people might be tempted to include irrelevant and unusable things. People get literal meanings and seem to get specific schemas because proverbs allow us to select mental structures and mechanisms based on contextual constraints. Perhaps, such elements are waiting to be activated only by the right input information. Within proverbs, people gather two aspects closely connected: their spirit and the specificity of their language. In fact, the originality, the language genus and the nations' specific particularities live within metaphors and metaphoric expressions.

The third saying - Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise - is founded on the idea of a good night's rest. Getting enough sleep automatically leads to a clear mind, a full work day and a successful life. SLEEP IS HEALTH AND SUCCESS is the conceptual metaphor that is conveyed by this proverb and it is projected by the semantic markers of the adverb early [+UNTIMELY, +PRIOR TO, +ADVANCE] that is juxtaposed both with the action of going to bed and with the action of waking up, thus imposing a clear focus on natural light and its relation to working hours. As a consequence, the clear, straightforward message of the proverb is health, wealth and wisdom. However, there are two Romanian versions. One is only focused on physical health - early to bed, early to rise keep you fit - and it loses the immediate wealth and success which come with early sleep. Thus, the conceptual metaphor belonging to the Romanian counterpart of the proverb is SLEEP IS HEALTH, whereas the second version entails a metaphoric distance covered in terms of life accomplishments - He who wakes up early covers more distance - and it projects the second conceptual metaphor EARLY WAKE UP IS SUCCESS.

⁵ Safeguard prevents things from happening/You'd better take care of your own health than send for the doctor.

English proverb	Romanian equivalent
As you make your bed so must you lie	Cum îți așterni așa dormi.
on it.	
Cut your coat according to your cloth -	Întinde-te cât îți e plapuma.
Where there's a will there's a way	Dacă vrei, poți.
Habit is second nature.	Obișnuința e a doua natură.

Table 3. Lifestyle metaphors in proverbs

In terms of lifestyle, there are similar concepts in both cultures analysed, as we have found equivalents for each proverb. Thus, the first pair - As you make your bed so must you lie on it / Cum îți așterni așa dormi - focuses on accepting the consequences of one's actions. Hence, depending on the situation, one must suffer, or enjoy the consequences of his/her doing. Therefore, the conceptual metaphor may vary, according to the life situation - A GOOD BED I S A GOOD SLEEP, or the reverse.

The second pair – *Cut your coat according to your cloth* and *Întinde-te cât îți e plapuma* – is rather tricky, because the Romanian conceptual metaphor is similar to the previous one as it is related to one's bed – thus, one's expenses should be limited to one's savings explained in the limited size of one's bed, while the British conceptual metaphor is related to tailoring, and it is explained in the limited size of one's cloth.

The following pairs have identical counterparts, which place both cultures under the same conceptual projections of identity in the case of will and habit. That is to say, will is stronger than life in *Where there's a will there's a way – Dacă vrei, poți,* but there is also the power of habit in *Habit is second nature – Obișnuința e a doua natură*. Therefore, we may have a lifestyle conceptual metaphor, such as WILL IS SUCCESS for the proactive people, or another – HABIT IS NATURE – for the passive people.

English proverb	Romanian equivalent
Don't put all your eggs in one basket.	Nu juca totul pe o singură carte.
Enough is as good as a feast.	Ce-i mult stică.
Robbing Peter to pay Paul.	A lua dintr-o parte ca să dai în alta.
We never miss the water till the well	Când seacă apa se cunoaște prețul
runs dry.	fântânii.
Look after the pence and the pounds	Cine nu prețuiește fierul, nu va număra
will look after themselves.	nici florinul.
A penny saved is a penny gained.	Păr cu păr se face cerga/ Bobiță cu
	bobiță se umple sacul.
A bird in the hand is worth two in the	Nu da vrabia din mână pe cioara de pe
bush.	gard.

Table 4. Wealth metaphors in proverbs

When it comes to acquiring wealth, both cultures focus more on saving money, being careful with one's belongings or being grateful for what one has already got. Therefore, the first category, which focuses on saving, includes the proverbs: Look after the pence and the pounds will look after themselves – Cine nu prețuiește fierul, nu va număra nici florinul and A penny saved is a penny gained – Păr cu păr se face cerga/Bobiță cu bobiță se umple sacul. PRUDENCE IS WEALTH represents the core conceptual metaphor of the entire set of proverbs related to the idea of wealth, but, in these particular cases, we may find a more intricate metaphor such as CAREFULNESS WITH CHANGE IS BIG WEALTH, as the focus is on pence and penny, in English. The Romanian versions focus more on belongings and wealth acquired in goods – iron, thread/hair, or seed – and there is only one reference to currency – the florin.

There is also a set of proverbs which deals with prudence in terms of risk management with investments or the mirage of the unknown. Hence we find the pairs: A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush – Nu da vrabia din mână pe cioara de pe gard and Don't put all your eggs in one basket – Nu juca totul pe o singură carte. Following the same conceptual metaphor PRUDENCE IS WEALTH, the meaning of the one of the sayings concentrates on the advice to hold on to what one

has already got, while the other focuses on the wisdom that one should not engage all efforts and resources in a single area to avoid losing everything. The first pair is almost identical in both English and Romanian, while the second is different in terms of semantics. Thus, Don't put all your eggs in one basket concentrates on one's goods and how well they are preserved, while the Romanian counterpart – Nu juca totul pe o singură carte – deals with the lexical field of gambling.

The last introduced metaphor deals with gratefulness for the present social status or financial situation: We never miss the water till the well runs dry – Când seacă apa se cunoaște prețul fântânii. This is to say that LOSS IS GATEFULNESS. However, the English culture refers to this idea of appreciation acknowledged after one's loss, given by the use of the verb miss with its semantic markers [+FAILURE, +LOSS], while the Romanian culture focuses on financial awareness, given by the noun price with its semantic marker [+value].

English proverb	Romanian equivalent
Forbidden fruit tastes sweetest.	Fructul oprit are gustul cel mai dulce.
Sill waters run deep.	Apele stătătoare sunt adânci.
Out of the frying pan into the fire.	Din lac în puț.

Table 5. *Metaphors of the unknown in proverbs*

The first pair of proverbs reveals the thrill of the unknown, which is the engine of all knowledge. Thus, it is in the human nature to be curious and eager to do things that are forbidden. Sometimes, it is enough to prove them wrong, but this would be out of personal experience, and would never be questioned. That is why *Forbidden fruit tastes sweetest* encompasses the conceptual metaphor INTERDICTION IS EXCITEMENT/FORBIDDENNESS IS THE SWEETEST. The forbidden fruit is also of biblical origin and it is the reason why life appeared in the form we experience. Thus, according to Christian belief and ideology, the engine of human progress, what makes us evolve in all scientific fields was the forbidden fruit.

The present analysis proves that proverbs bring up characteristics about people and their social life which they evaluate and try to correct by mentioning the implications or the possible results. They are constructed in such a way so as to encompass a multitude of meanings. The cognitive metaphors underlining our examples may also be viewed as topics for classifying them in relation to the mind schemas that organise our knowledge about the world. The image schemas constitute cognitive models having cultural specific aspects, such as brand models that can be used in comprehending all sorts of situations emphasized by the proverbs.

Conclusions

The mental mechanisms that are activated in proverbs prove that the cognitive perspective is suitable for accessing the universal principles that underline their cognition. Conceptual metaphors play an essential role in shaping the abstract concepts in terms of other concepts which are grounded in physical experience. The perceptions that result from this process shape the national image of a society which is in fact, a cultural phenomenon. The national image says something about the cultural identity of a society. On the one hand, people are viewed as entities whose value is influenced by the brand images promoted by culture/society. On the other hand, society, through its individuals, relies on cultural values such as education, ethics, health, wealth, commodity, etc., which may also be interpreted as brand values or cultural labels of a society.

Language in its turn is not only a system of communication between individuals but also the identity marker of a social phenomenon. Thus, it profoundly influences the way people interpret the world because language and thought interact in many significant ways. Language shapes not only the way we think but also our culture.

Proverbs may definitively be seen as cultural branding products of human society. They outline the essence of us through moral lessons that have been experienced and accepted as general truths. Some proverbs may transmit pessimistic or optimistic messages, while others can be paradoxical or enigmatic. Sometimes proverbs mislead for a reason or simply state the obvious. Thus, the cultural brands they connote may have positive or negative associations perpetuating superstitions of, for example, what leads to good health or to a balanced life or promising good luck and fortune according to circumstances. Consequently, with their help we can get a better understanding of our identity.

From a conceptual point of view, both Romanian and British proverbs provide a sense of unity. They are based on traditions and emphasize valuable key concepts such as measure in terms of prudence, health in terms of a balanced diet and good sleep, courage in terms of bravery even though fear is present, wisdom in terms of measure or in terms of an active life, cowardice in terms of fear or love in terms of distance and absence in terms of affection. The quest for identity in terms of cultural branding can only be performed through such key concepts which are emblematic and serve as emotional branding strategies to persuade people to learn wisely, from the moral lessons/ messages delivered through proverbs.

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