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COGNITIVE DIMENSIONS OF HAPPINESS METAPHORS IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN

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Abstract

Happiness, seen as one of the six universal basic human emotions, seems to be conceptualized, according to Kövecses (2000) in fundamentally similar terms across languages. On the other hand, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis favours the idea according to which semantic structure conditions the non-linguistic knowledge, thus resulting in a different perception of the surrounding reality, which includes the perception of emotions. The present paper aims at examining the conceptual schemes at the basis of happiness metaphors in English and Romanian, and the (non) equivalent correspondences that may be observed between the two, so as to verify the validity of such claims.

Keywords: conceptualization; metaphorization; equivalence; translatability; semantic content

1. INTRODUCTION

Happiness as a multifaceted concept has always been the focus of keen interest on the part of researchers belonging to various areas of expertise, as it is quite difficult to define and render into words. According to OED, it has multiple meanings, as follows: "1. The quality or condition of being happy: a) good fortune or good luck in life generally or in a particular affair; success, prosperity; b) an instance or cause of good fortune; 2. a) The pleasurable contentment of mind, deep pleasure in or contentment with one's circumstances; b) an instance or source of pleasure or contentment; 3. Successful or felicitous aptitude, fitness, suitability, or appropriateness; felicity" (2019). Therefore, it can be stated that there are sub-types of emotions that are subsumed to the general category HAPPINESS which should also be taken into account when analysing its linguistic realizations. It goes without saying that in assessing the state of happiness, typically equated to pleasure, contentment, felicity, prosperity, a high degree of subjectivity is always present, making it even more difficult to fully comprehend and explain. Being such an elusive concept withstanding the strict limitations of a textbook definition, it is no wonder that more often than not it is linguistically actualized by means of metaphorical expressions, defying the confinement of fixed meanings. It is often said that everyone experiences happiness in a personal subjective manner, and there are as many happiness types as there are individuals, which makes it hard to conceptualize and actualize



in language. Metaphor, with its special equivalence mechanisms, transposes the abstract into the concrete in a manner that seems most accessible to speakers across cultures.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Therefore, it is no surprise that the metaphorical expressions of happiness, one of the six basic human emotions, are at the forefront of linguistic study, especially from the point of view of Cognitive Linguistics. Drawing on its close connection with psychological and sociological sciences, cognitivism provides a fresh perspective upon the mechanisms whereby human beings understand and express the surrounding reality. Starting from Chomsky (1972), who saw the interconnectedness between linguistics and psychology as a given, metaphor has gradually been accepted as not only a mere ornament pertaining to stylistics, but as an integral part of everyday speech, enabling the speakers to grasp concepts via an intricate system of associations.

In any case, the first who used the term “conceptual metaphor”, trying to explain linguistic meanings via concepts in a clearer manner were Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999). Their studies are central to the entire movement connected to cognitivism, which also includes psychological, epistemological, and sociological studies, whose main claim is that people basically think in terms of metaphorical mappings that achieve correspondences between a typically abstract source domain and a normally concrete target domain. This approach is rather empirical, as it states that the human body is a central point of reference in the linguistic realization of mainly abstract concepts, and therefore the human body and language “cannot be investigated in isolation from human embodiment” (Evans & Green, 2006:44).

It seems that certain concepts that are more difficult to grasp, due to their complexity and centrality in the human universe, are virtually impossible to express in a non-metaphorical manner, such as time, which is usually described in terms of concrete space and movement (cf. Gibbs, 1994). It is only fair to point out that happiness, quite an abstract and subjective notion, appears to fall in the same category, and requires metaphorical representation based on embodied experience.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As it is considered that sensory experiences precede abstract understanding, it is predicted in conceptual metaphor theory that the conceptual mappings in language are unidirectional, connecting the concrete to the abstract. In other words, abstract concepts are predicted as always being understood in terms of concrete words, and source-target mappings are predicted to be grounded in embodied experience. Since human beings experience the physical world in similar ways, it has been hypothesized (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999) that similar mappings between source and target domains will be detected in unrelated languages. Indeed, at first sight it is quite obvious that the figurative expressions used in reference to happiness in English and Romanian, such as the instantiations referring to verticality and upward motion. Thus, patterns of concrete-to-abstract mappings emerge in language via structured metaphors (Kövecses 2002). The present research aims at discovering the main patterns at the basis of the dead metaphors referring to happiness in English and Romanian, in order to prove that such patterns are universal and transgress language boundaries.

4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

These discernible patterns found in English and Romanians can be compared and contrasted in order to assess the validity of the assumption that people speaking unrelated languages share the same conceptual schemes and cognitive models, as they resort to the basic universal core of human knowledge and embodied experience. In case any deviations are found, they may be accounted for by the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, essentially claiming that the language we speak shapes the universe around us, and we perceive the surrounding world and everything pertaining to it via our native language.

5. RESEARCH METHODS

The present research is based on a small-scale corpus analysis, consisting of the most common conceptualizations of happiness in English and Romanian, as found in specialized literature and phraseological dictionaries. More specifically, it was attempted to answer the research questions by the

comparison and contrast of linguistic realisations of happiness metaphors in English as source language and in Romanian as target/secondary language. In doing so, the analysis of the available self-made corpus of metaphors observed the three stages of metaphor analysis as proposed by Cameron and Low (1999: 88, as cited in Charteris-Black 2004: 34), i.e.:

- a) collecting examples of linguistic metaphors;
- b) generalising on their basis so that to reach the conceptual metaphors of which they are an actualization;
- c) using the results to suggest patterns of thought and comprehension.

As the present study is a contrastive one, a fourth step is added, consisting of the comparison between the patterns of thought and comprehension in English and Romanian, aiming at discovering (dis)similarities between the two languages (and cultures/mentalities) in terms of conceptualizing happiness. More specifically, it was attempted to see if the metaphors are preserved in the Romanian translation of the English metaphors collected from various significant researchers dealing with the topic.

6. FINDINGS

The main source of the English corpus is mainly due to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999), Kövecses (1989, 1991, 2000), Stefanowitsch (2006), who propose as the main schemes of structuring the understanding of the emotion in English the following two patterns: HAPPINESS IS LIGHT and HAPPINESS IS UP, as can be seen in the following fundamental hypothetical mappings and sample expressions:

A) Metaphor: HAPPINESS IS LIGHT

Examples:

English	Romanian
Look on the bright side.	Privește partea bună a lucrurilor.
Her face glowed with happiness.	Fața îi strălucea de fericire.
You are the sunshine of my life.	Ești soarele vieții mele/lumina ochilor mei/tot ce am mai scump pe lume/Îmi luminezi viața/Aduci lumină în viața mea.

B) Metaphor: HAPPINESS IS UP

Examples:

English	Romanian
We had to cheer him up.	A trebuit să-i ridicăm moralul/ să-l înveselim/consolăm.
They were in high spirits.	Erau bine dispuși/ în toane bune.
I'm soaring with joy.	Plutesc de fericire.
Lighten up!	Nu mai fi așa serios!/ Ia-o mai ușor!

At first sight, despite a certain inequality in overlapping the two metaphorical patterns, which is after all to be expected, English and Romanian choose the same images to actualize happiness linguistically. When rendering the English instantiations into Romanian there are cases of semantic loss and displacement, but all in all, the patterns are operational in both languages.

It goes without saying that these basic metaphors for happiness also have specific complex extensions in English, which further analyze the various types of source domains that humans resort to when describing the multi-faceted state of happiness, among which the following are salient:

Metaphor: HAPPINESS IS LIGHT CONTAINED IN THE EYES (Kövecses 1991:31):

Examples:

English	Romanian
Amusement gleamed in her eyes.	I se citea amuzamentul în ochi/ Îi luceau ochii de veselie.
His eyes glinted as he told us the good news.	Ochii îi sclipeau când ne-a adus vestea cea bună.
His eyes radiated with joy.	Îi străluceau ochii de bucurie.
His eyes were bright with joy.	Îi străluceau ochii de bucurie.

HAPPINESS IS BEING OFF THE GROUND

Examples:

English	Romanian
I am soaring with joy.	Plutesc de fericire.
She was on cloud nine.	Era în al nouălea cer.

HAPPINESS IS BEING IN HEAVEN

Examples:

English	Romanian
It was paradise on earth.	Era raiul pe pământ.
Being with you is like being in seventh heaven.	Cu tine mă simt ca în rai/ paradis/ al nouălea cer.

HAPPINESS IS FEELING LIGHT (AS OPPOSED TO HEAVY)

Example:

English	Romanian
Lighten up!	Relaxează-te/ las-o mai moale/ nu te îngrijora/ nu te necăji!
Take a load off!	Ia-o mai ușor!

HAPPINESS IS WARMTH

Examples:

English	Romanian
His smile warmed the cockles of her heart.	Zâmbetul lui îi încălzea inima.
They felt all warm and fuzzy inside.	Simțeau cum îi cuprinde fericirea/ Simțeau cum li se încălzește inima.

HAPPINESS IS VITALITY

Examples:

English	Romanian
She's animated with joy.	Bucuria o însuflețește.
He was alive with joy.	Era fericit și plin de viață.

HAPPINESS IS HEALTH

Example:

English	Romanian
I feel very good about it.	Acest lucru îmi creează un sentiment pozitiv/ Acest lucru îmi dă o senzație foarte plăcută.

HAPPINESS IS A PLEASURABLE SENSATION

Example:

English	Romanian
I was tickled pink.	Eram extrem de satisfăcut/mulțumit.

HAPPINESS IS A FLUID IN A CONTAINER

Examples:

English	Romanian
We were full of joy.	Eram plini de bucurie.
He was overwhelmed with joy.	Era copleșit de fericire.
His heart swelled with joy.	I s-a umplut inima de bucurie/fericire.
His heart burst with joy.	Nu-și mai încăpea în piele de bucurie/fericire.

HAPPINESS IS A CAPTIVE ANIMAL

Example:

English	Romanian
His feelings of happiness broke loose.	S-a lăsat pradă fericirii/ S-a lăsat în voia fericirii.

HAPPINESS IS AN OPPONENT IN A STRUGGLE

Examples:

English	Romanian
Happiness took complete control of him.	Și-a pierdut cu totul controlul de fericire/Fericirea l-a luat complet în stăpânire/ Și-a pierdut capul de

	fericire.
He is a real killjoy.	E genul care îți strică tot cheful/ E posac/morocănos.

HAPPINESS IS INSANITY/A DISEASE/INTOXICATION

Examples:

English	Romanian
She was mad with joy/ She was crazy with happiness.	E nebună de fericire.
Her good mood was contagious.	Buna ei dispoziție era contagioasă.
I was drunk with joy.	Eram beat de fericire.
I'm high on life.	Sunt beat/copleșit de fericire. Mă simt fericit că trăiesc. Mă bucur de viață. Îmi place viața mea.

HAPPINESS IS A NATURAL FORCE

Example:

English	Romanian
We were carried away with happiness.	Ne-a luat valul de fericire.
He was swept off his feet.	N-a mai știut de el de bucurie.

HAPPINESS IS A (DESIRED) HIDDEN OBJECT

Example:

English	Romanian
I am searching for happiness.	Îmi caut fericirea.
[...] the pursuit of happiness	căutarea fericirii/urmărirea fericirii/dreptul la fericire

HAPPINESS IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY

Example:

English	Romanian
You can't buy happiness.	Nu poți cumpăra fericirea/ Fericirea nu se cumpără cu bani/Fericirea nu poate fi cumpărată.

HAPPINESS IS AN ANIMAL THAT LIVES WELL

Examples:

English	Romanian
He is as happy as a clam.	E foarte fericit.
He is as happy as a pig in shit.	Nu mai poate de fericire/mulțumire.

The sources of the English metaphors are for the most part the following: Lakoff & Johnson (1980); Lakoff et al. (1991); Kövecses (1989, 1991, 2000a). The Romanian instantiations are personal translations, as prompted by the linguistic competence of the author as a native speaker and supported by various phraseological dictionaries.

First and foremost, it should be noted that in many instantiations happiness is equated with joy, as most of their semantic content seems to overlap, and the metaphoric mappings are preserved. Other possible partial synonyms for happiness, such as satisfaction, cheerfulness, contentment, have also been included in the corpus. As it appears, the wide range of source domains which have been proposed for the target domain of happiness are both ontological and orientational, including conceptual domains involving dimensional scales (verticality, upward movement), physical sensations and states associated with happiness, and the construal of happiness as a force or animate agent such as a type of animal or phenomenon.

As expected, the main conceptual patterns are preserved in Romanian, supporting the universality of the linguistic expression of happiness, despite the fact that not all the examples in the English corpus have equivalent metaphorical counterparts in Romanian. On the whole, it seems that Romanian also conceptualizes happiness in terms of light and motion on a vertical scale. As far as the more marginal realizations of happiness are concerned, like the ontological submappings centered on animals, opponents

and physical sensations, it is no wonder that the Romanian language lacks the necessary resources and prefers a literal translation.

In addition, it is to be remarked that the Romanian counterparts do not always observe the initial mapping in English, but instead resort to related submappings occurring in other English actualizations, except for the quite low number of cases when metaphoricity is lost and replaced by the literal translation. Oddly enough though, in many cases the Romanian language transposes the conceptual scheme into HAPPINESS IS LOSS, equating happiness to an uncontrollable phenomenon, resulting in linguistic expressions like "a-și pierde capul", "a-și pierde controlul", "a fi copleșit", "a fi luat de val", etc., with a more overtly negative dimension than in English. Therefore, it can easily be speculated that the Romanians typically have a darker view of the world, choosing to focus on the negative aspects of this positive emotion.

In the same vein, the conceptual schemes which put happiness in relation to health and vitality, although quite straightforward and quite easy to motivate, pose a problem in the Romanian translation, which needs the explicitation of the image in a sort of paraphrasial rendering quite devoid of metaphoricity.

A special mention is due to the final instantiations consisting of ossified similes, that do not actually have an equally figurative counterpart in Romanian, the typical translation strategy being to equate them to the superlative, i.e. "foarte fericit". There are however certain livresque possibilities to perform a similar-effect functional translation, by means of religiously marked terms of comparison, such as "fericit ca Lazăr" (literally "happy as Lazarus") or "fericit ca un izbăvit din iad" (literally "happy as a person delivered from hell"), although none of these equivalents have been attested in specialized phraseological dictionaries so far. There is also an equally literate counterpart, originating in Ion Creangă's well-known memory book "Memories of My Boyhood", viz. "vesel ca vremea cea bună", but none of these figurative translations are in current use or even part of the mental lexicon of the average speaker.

In any case, the most interesting instantiation seems "to be to be tickled pink" which, according to Kövecses (1989:129) chooses as source domain PLEASURABLE SENSATION; it is rather difficult to translate into Romanian, the possible equivalents being the literal "extrem de satisfăcut/ mulțumit"; it is obvious that the action proper (a gădila), and the colour reference (roz) are not included in the Romanian actualization, probably due to their distributional specificity..

7. CONCLUSION

So, it can be concluded that happiness is metaphorically represented in quite a similar manner in English and Romanian, as apparent from the analysis of the conceptual schemes in current use. Both languages make use of linguistic actualizations of the two main metaphorical patterns HAPPINESS IS LIGHT and HAPPINESS IS UP/VERTICAL MOVEMENT, with a significant preference for the latter. As expected, certain actualizations do not overlap, as is the case of the submappings where the vehicle is health, vitality, captive animal, opponent, natural force or pleasurable sensation, but on the whole the differences are not significant. In case the metaphor is not operational in Romanian, the preferred translation technique is explicitation and paraphrasing, with an evident loss of metaphoricity. The special case of similes is also devoid of Romanian counterparts, being, more often than not, replaced by the mere superlative of the adjective "happy".

Thus, although the corpus used in the research is quite small-scale, the hypothesis of our research is validated, i.e. unrelated languages, in our case English and Romanian, generally resort to the same conceptual metaphors to represent happiness, one of the six basic human emotions. The differences found in the linguistic actualisations of these schemes may be interpreted as being due to the slightly more pessimistic view of the world that is specific to the Romanians, who see even happiness in terms of loss and negative phenomena.

However, the number of such instantiations is quite low, so that it is safe to conclude that the patterns describing the abstract concept of happiness by means of embodied experience and concrete images are common in English and Romanian; therefore, happiness is a universal emotion which is metaphorically rendered in language in an equally universal manner.

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