

ECONOMIC METAPHORS IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE MASS MEDIA COURSE

Elena VARZARI

Lecturer

Alecu Russo Balti State University, Moldova

Oxana STANȚIERU

Lecturer

Alecu Russo Balti State University, Moldova

Rezumat: Prezentul articol este rezultatul experienței acumulate în timpul predării limbii engleze ca limbă străină și a limbajului specializat englez în cadrul cursului „Mass media” studenților anului trei. Ne vom concentra asupra unor aspecte de o importanță semnificativă în pregătirea viitorilor specialiști abili, care vor putea lucra nu doar în țara lor, dar și în străinătate. De asemenea, intenționăm să abordăm problema importanței predării metaforelor economice studenților EFL, care învață vocabularul specializat în cadrul cursului „Limbajul mass media englez”.

Ne propunem să explicăm modul în care conținutul și finalitățile disciplinei în discuție, predate la universitatea noastră, diferă de cele predate în alte universități.

Cuvinte cheie: mass-media, metaforă, metaforă economică, ESS (engleza pentru scopuri specifice), traducere.

“What better way of preserving a professional monopoly than by locking up your trade secrets in the safe of an unknown tongue?” (Mellinkoff, 1963, p. 101)

Introduction

From the beginning we would like to clarify the terminology we use in the present article: EFL stands for English as foreign language, ESP means English for specific purposes, and LMMC equals the language of the Mass Media course.

It is evident that modern students want their studies to be “less academic and esoteric, and more practical and application-oriented”, so that they (studies) “lead them to something useful”. Present students have realized that in the contemporary world “Economies and markets want to

employ people with vocational skills” (Harding, 2018, p. 6-7), that is why they must possess more skills than the ones gained at university.

Understanding everyday English as well as the considerable knowledge of diverse terminology has become essential due to the expansion of globalization and an increasing need of professionals who are able to understand and speak English properly. Consequently, people have become aware of the emergent demand for non-native speakers of English of various jobs to develop their linguistic and communicative skills, so that they could meet the criteria of the changing professional world. In this regard teaching ESP has become vital and we agree with Hutchinson et al. who mention that “as the demand was growing for English courses tailored to specific needs, influential new ideas began to emerge in the study of language” (Hutchinson, Waters, 1987, p. 7). That is why we thought it would be a good idea to design some content to be used in the LMMC applying some of the approaches specific for the ESP programmes. We should make it clear from the very start that the LMMC at our university is taught as part of EFL content, and, as the level of our students’ knowledge of English has increased, we could make the LMM lessons more professionally oriented, so that our graduates feel more confident when they get employed.

It is incontestable that in the General English as a foreign language class, students are taught the basics – pronunciation, grammar and everyday vocabulary, that is also important, while in the ESP class the focus is on a particular lexis required by learners for a better understanding of their domains. As Schleppegrell & Bowman claim, “The major difference between ESP and EFL lies in the learners and their purposes for learning English” (Schleppegrell, Bowman, 1986, p. 1). In other words, ESP students are mostly adults who have already got certain knowledge of general English and expect to pick up the language in order to communicate fluently on topics dealing with their further professional activity, and get a set of specialized skills to cope with “their job-related functions” (ibidem, p. 1). The researchers also state that “ESP is part of a larger movement within language teaching away from a concentration on teaching grammar and language structures to an emphasis on language in context” (ibidem, p. 1). The ESP course focuses on the idea that English is not taught as a subject isolated from the students’ real world; it is

incorporated into a subject matter area important to the learner (Fiorito, 2005). To put it differently, such a course aims at achieving specific goals and needs for which knowledge of English is mandatory. Being used in academic studies or for vocational or professional intents ESP is associated with “an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning” (Hutchinson, Waters, 1991, p. 19).

Considering that the aim of an ESP course is to aid students to act effectively in certain circumstances, i.e. when they will have to “use the language they are learning, then the ESP course design process should proceed by first identifying the target situation and then carrying out a rigorous analysis of the linguistic features of that situation” (ibidem, p. 12).

We assume that in the course of training future English teachers and translators / interpreters, the implementation of some ESP methodologies while teaching such a subject as the LMM would be appropriate. As it covers a diverse range of topics (genres) we have thought it might be of interest to choose a topic and teach it showing the learners its practical application in their future jobs.

We support Keith Harding who suggests “using authentic materials, analysing language in a practical way” (Harding, 2018, p 10). The tasks should be tailored in such a way that they give the students the chance to do “things with the material that they actually need to do in their work” (ibidem). Teachers should stimulate their students’ learning by using interactive teaching methods, “variety, relevance and fun” (ibidem, p. 11). Accordingly, the main purpose of the LMMC is to provide students with such “fillings” that would facilitate learning via the specific language of the media.

The language of the mass media course

The LMMC taught at our university is an essential part of the set of compulsory subjects from the *Curriculum* that aims at familiarizing students with the peculiarities of the specificity of the media language, with the journalistic genres (articles, comments, interviews, critical reports, etc.), their structure and possible problems of understanding and translating media texts, both press texts and audio-visual. Special attention in this context is paid to the specific vocabulary and ways of choosing the equivalents of the structural units while translating the media texts. The

outcomes of the course could be formulated in the following way: by the end of the course, the students will be able to apply knowledge of the English language to understand media texts; to use the learnt vocabulary in various contexts; to adequately apply the acquired information and lexis for translating various types of texts from / into English; and to use notions of history, culture and civilization to understand texts from the media field. We rely on a multitude of printed (and not only) media resources available at our library, language centres and online.

As for a mass media course abroad, it “offers students the opportunity to study the form, content, history and issues related to mass media while learning the skills necessary to produce basic content for mass media outlets” (i.e. print, online, and broadcast)”. At the Community College of Philadelphia, for instance, it is intended “for students seeking [...] to study Mass Media, Journalism, Advertising, Public Relations and Communication”³, while at USARB it is designed for future EFL teachers and / or translators/interpreters. This definitely determines the form and the topics studied within the course.

As there are several types (forms) of Mass Media content, for instance: *printed* (newspapers, magazines, books, brochures, leaflets, etc.), *outdoor* (ambient marketing), *broadcasting* (TV, Radio, etc.), *digital* (social media platforms, streaming services, etc.), we try to make full use of each, selecting various articles that might be of interest to our students. The LMMC covers a wide range of topics among which one can find: Mass Media and Communication, Fighting Terrorism, War and Peace, Crime and Justice and *Global Markets*. The last one contains several sub-topics: *Security Market*, *Going Public*, *Commodity Market*, and *The Advertising Industry* in which the idiomatic language of economics, i.e. economic metaphors can be found. We consider it to be a very actual subject matter that permanently enhances the students’ interest as it is constantly submitted to changes.

Economic Metaphor

Extensive studies on the economic metaphor have been done by

³ Mass Media, *Course Description*. Community College of Philadelphia. Retrieved from: <https://www.ccp.edu/college-catalog/degree-programs/associate-arts-aa/mass-media> [accessed 21.12.2022]

many experts such as Charteris-Black & Ennis 2001⁴, Hunt & Menon, 1995⁵; Khalil, 1998⁶; Kheovichai, 2015, Lakoff & Johnson, 1980⁷, McCloskey, 1995⁸; Musolff & Zinken, 2009⁹, Rindfleisch, 1996¹⁰, Silaški & Durovic, 2010¹¹; Skorczynska & Deignan, 2006¹², etc. It is considered the role of the metaphor in business English nowadays has grown considerably and it has become a rather popular topic. As Kheovichai (2015) affirms “The importance of metaphor in business English has been confirmed by both economics and linguistics research”. [...] Moreover, they have concluded “that metaphor is a crucial tool to develop theories in economics” [...] “and communicate ideas and business phenomena to the public”, having substantially contributed “to business English research”. (Kheovichai, 2015, p. 94).

To clarify the term *economic metaphors*, we have studied several definitions of the notion *metaphor*. Thus, Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines it as “a word or phrase used to describe somebody/something else, in a way that is different from its normal use, in order to show that the two things have the same qualities and to make the

⁴ Charteris-Black, J., Ennis, T. A Comparative Study of Metaphor in Spanish and English Financial Reporting. In: *English for Specific Purposes*, Volume 20, Issue 3, 2001, pp. 249–266.

⁵ Hunt, S., D., Menon, A. Metaphors and Competitive Advantage: Evaluating the Use of Metaphors in Theories of Competitive Strategy. In: *Journal of Business Research*, Volume 33, Issue 2, June 1995, pp. 81–90.

⁶ Khalil, E. L. The Five Careers of the Biological Metaphor in Economic Theory. In: *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, Volume 27, Issue 1, pp. 29-52.

⁷ Lakoff, G., Johnson, M. *Metaphors We Live by*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

⁸ McCloskey, D. (1995) Metaphor Economists Live by. In: *Social Research*, Volume 62, Issue 2, pp. 215–237.

⁹ Musolff, A., Zinken, J. *Metaphor and Discourse*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

¹⁰ Rindfleisch, A. Marketing as Warfare: Reassessing a Dominant Metaphor. In: *Business Horizons*, Volume 39, Issue 5, September-October 1996, pp. 3-10.

¹¹ Silaški, N., Durovic, T. Catching Inflation by the Tail – Animal Metaphoric Imagery in the Conceptualisation of Inflation in English. In: *Ibérica*, Volume 20, 2010, pp. 57–80.

¹² Skorczynska, H., Deignan, A. Readership and Purpose in the Choice of Economics Metaphors. In: *Metaphor and Symbol*, Volume 21(2), 2006, pp. 87–104.

description more powerful” (Hornby, 2001, p. 803). Encyclopaedia Britannica highlights the idea that “[...] The metaphor makes a qualitative leap from a reasonable, perhaps prosaic comparison to an identification or fusion of two objects to make one new entity partaking of the characteristics of both. (Gwinn, 1993, p. 61). As any metaphor adds charming specificity to a statement we could use it to express our thoughts, and convey complex ideas with ease. This is the reason of using metaphors in science to refer to concepts that would be unclear.

G. Lakoff’s studies have led to a significant “shift in perception of metaphor” as he introduced an innovative theory of metaphor, attributing it totally original features and the way it is used, apart from literary language, in language in general. Lakoff’s idea that metaphor is not only a matter of language, but also a matter of thought has become central in many studies. He considers that our way of life is “purely metaphorical” as the language is packed with metaphors that lack any purpose, and people use them because it is in their nature to do it, i.e. “[...] everyday abstract concepts like time, states, change, causation, and purpose also turn out to be metaphorical” (Lakoff 1993: 203). In the modern world economics is to be found everywhere in our quotidian lives, even if we do not always realize it. Whether it explains how companies work, people choose, customers buy, or governments subsidize, economists examine the evidence and produce theories that can be checked in practice. Economic ideologies are very often outlined in metaphorical terms and, like all other metaphors, economic metaphors can hide features of our reality. However, in economics, metaphors matter more because they limit our lives. In Lakoff and Johnson’s belief, conceptual metaphor regards one thing in terms of another, that further leads to metaphorical expressions. It is a representation of two conceptual domains, i.e. “the source domain onto the target domain at the cognitive level” (Lakoff, 1993, p. 203).

In their book “Metaphors We Live By”, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explain the nature of the economic metaphors, considering that a metaphor in a political or economic system, by what it hides, can lead to human degradation (Lakoff, Johnson, 2003, p. 236). In the same study, they provide the analysis of the metaphor “labour is a resource”. They explain how this metaphor hides the nature of the labour, without making any distinction between types of labour, helping to detach it from its

performers, and permitting the speaker to avoid this unpleasant feature. They stress the idea that “metaphorization of economy-related speeches” permits “the speaker to detach the world of the economy from the real world. [...] This is the power of a metaphor: it can explain complex concepts using simpler denotes, but, at the same time, creates some new entities in the discourse that can distract the audience from the core meaning of the speech and from its connection to the real world” (ibidem, p. 236-237).

It is worth mentioning the idea of *Occam's razor* principle,¹³ which clarifies another motive for using metaphors in the economic discourse. According to this principle “entities should not be multiplied beyond necessity” (Shaffner, 2015, p. 644). What stands behind, is the idea that preference should be given to an easier and simpler way of explaining a new concept. According to *Occam's razor* principle, it is more effective to use a metaphor than to try to introduce a new concept.

Judging by the data provided in numerous studies on the topic under consideration, the metaphorical economic language covers numerous areas / domains of the human activity that are not directly linked to the world of business and finances as follows: biology, mechanics, physics, anatomy, gardening, etc. They are “involved” in a process that generates a variety of new business terms, e.g. concepts dealing with financial crises, currency trading, banking investments, economic growth or decline etc.

Scholars tend to consider that within classical economics the main metaphors originate from the mechanical world view of Newtonian physics. Hence, Adam Smith's famous metaphor “invisible hand” for the unseen forces that move the free market economy and David Ricardo's image of the economic order as a gravitation process are examples of remote forces operating at a distance to maintain a system. Several famous economists used biological metaphors in their discourse for various purposes. Joseph Schumpeter deployed biological metaphors in his use of

¹³ “*Occam's razor* is a principle of theory construction or evaluation according to which, other things equal, explanations that posit fewer entities, or fewer kinds of entities, are to be preferred to explanations that posit more”. Retrieved from: Occam's razor, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Occams-razor>

mutation as a changed descriptor. Karl Marx focused on biological metaphors in his discussions of socioeconomic transitions in general and technological change in particular. In his famous work, “Capital”, Marx proves his preference for using biological metaphors. In the Preface to this work, he compares the society to the human body (conceptual metaphor *economy is a human body*) claiming that it is easier to study the whole body than individual cells and it is rather challenging to find tools that would be “of assistance in the analysis of economic forms. The power of abstraction must replace both. But for bourgeois society, the commodity-form of the product of labour, or the value-form of the commodity, is the economic cell form” (Marx, 1976, p. 90).

As it has been mentioned above, not only biological metaphors are being used in the economic discourse. Many others originate from different areas of knowledge and research, such as health, weather, nature and others. For instance, the conceptual metaphors *the economy is a patient* roots from the Health domain, *economic problems are weather conditions* originate from the Weather domain, while *economic problems are natural disasters* and *economic problems are fires* root from the Nature domain. These metaphors demonstrate that it is often easier to understand an economic process looking through the prism of another, already known process or phenomenon.

Consequently, metaphors do not only describe a reality; they may offer hints to the intentions of those who use them, and, in such a way, they may contribute to outlining the cognitive framework within which these actors operate. Their use is not simply an attempt by commentators or economists to demonstrate their imaginative capacities or appeal to their audiences’ imaginations. Metaphors are used by economists to find a greater emotional response from listeners’ live response.

We have stated earlier that we teach economic metaphors in the LMMC, which is a rather challenging task in terms of selecting the appropriate lexis. A thorough study of metaphor use in Business English (based on the high frequency lexis identified in *The Economist*) aiming at teaching the ESP has been done by Jonathan Charteris-Black. The researcher claims that “Of particular interest is the use of animate metaphors to describe the economy (growth, depression, etc.) and economic organisations (parent/sister company, etc.) and inanimate

metaphors to describe market movements (rebounds, slides, etc.)” (Charteris-Black, 2000, p. 149). Charteris-Black develops the issue affirming that “In the choice of metaphors the economist is able to vary the extent to which predictions and control are presented as feasible” (ibidem). Charteris-Black adds that metaphor can help successfully teach students certain business terminology and improve their comprehension of those business concepts that are commonly generated by metaphor. Among several domains he examined the lexis that generally collocates with the words *economy* and *market*, mainly the ones that are regarded as metaphorical expressions. Charteris-Black observed that *animate metaphors* would normally collocate with the word *economy*, whilst *inanimate metaphors* often collocate with *market*. Eventually, he describes the notions *market* and *economy* as being “under the control of human agency” (ibidem).

We consider that metaphor is an excellent tool to enhance students’ acquisition of specialized vocabulary in the ESP class and stick to Charteris-Black’s belief “It is part of the generative aspect of metaphor to assist the development of a routine vocabulary for handling economic ideas.” (ibidem, p. 358).

Now we would like to provide some examples of economic metaphors from various domains our students have to translate into their mother tongue (Romanian or Russian).

1. HUMAN / PERSON Metaphors:

✓ “Many businesses have not yet shed the outdated view that the mature market is made up of **stingy old-timers** set in their ways” (The Economist, 2002).

Ru. *Многие компании ещё не избавились от устаревшего представления, что развитый рынок состоит из **скупых стариков**, живущих своим укладом.*

Rom. *Multe companii nu au renunțat încă la viziunea perimată, conform căreia piața matură este formată din **bătrâni zgârciți**, așezați în felul lor.”*

2. ANIMAL Metaphors:

✓ How “**Tax Ferrets**” Revealed the Limits of Heavy-Handed Enforcement. (Forbes, 2022)

Ru. *Как «**ищейки**» (налоговые инспекторы) раскрыли пределы*

жесткого правоприменения.

Rom. *Modul în care „copoii fiscali” (inspectorii fiscali) au dezvăluit limitele aplicării dure a legii.*

✓ He started out as a **dogsboddy** at the Croydon Times and then just built this empire of 220 papers across the country. (BBC, 2022)

Ru. *Он начинал как **простой работяга** в Croydon Times, а затем просто построил свою империю из 220 газет по всей стране.*

Rom. *A început ca un **muncitor necalificat** la Croydon Times, iar apoi simplu a construit acest imperiu de 220 de ziare în toată țara.*

3. NATURE Metaphors

✓ Global **growth** is slowing, but not stopping – yet. (The Economist, 2022)

Ru. *Глобальный **рост** замедляется, но не останавливается. Пока.*

Rom. ***Creșterea** globală încetinește, dar nu se oprește. Deocamdată.*

4. BUILDING Metaphors

✓ **Floor to ceiling**. Our latest round-up shows that prices are on the rise in most markets. (The Economist, 2010)

Ru. ***От пола и до потолка.** Наш последний обзор показывает, что цены на большинстве рынков растут.*

Rom. ***De la podea la tavan.** Cel mai recent raport al nostru arată că prețurile sunt în creștere pe majoritatea piețelor.*

5. WEATHER Metaphors

✓ Iceland is in the heart of the **economic storm**. (Fouché, 2008)

Ru. *Исландия находится в самом центре **экономического шторма.***

Rom. *Islanda se află în centrul **furtunii economice.***

It is important to teach this specific economic language within MMLC and train students in their translation, as the media serve as the main “tool” for introducing and understanding economic vocabulary and economic knowledge. The mass media does not only popularize knowledge about the economic processes but also influence the recipients, shaping their models of behaviour in a particular economic situation.

Conclusions

Given these points we can conclude that a General EFL course gives learners the chance to grow into fluent users of the English language. On the other hand, ESP, being a student-centred approach, primarily focuses

on the link between the theoretical and practical content aiming at helping students not only to improve the four language skills, but also to apply them successfully both in the academic and the professional contexts. It is thought that “the ESP approach enhances the relevance of what the students are learning and enables them to use the English they know to learn even more English, since their interest in their field will motivate them to interact with speakers and texts” (Schleppergrell, Bowman, 1986, p. 2).

Besides, it should be highlighted that the teaching methods and materials used in the ESP class are based on the results of the students’ needs analysis (Dudley-Evans, 1998, p. 132). We have surveyed our students to identify their main fields of interest, so that we could include them in the LMM curriculum. They are mostly aware of their needs; thus, knowledge of the subject area allows them to identify the actual context for the LMM course. Consequently, they definitely take advantage of their background knowledge and apply it in the LLMC.

Business English, being packed with economic metaphors, turned out to be rather difficult for understanding and finding translation equivalents in the target language to many foreign learners as they repeatedly misunderstand or misinterpret them. That is why lecturers should pay more attention to teaching metaphor in business English, highlighting the business lexis from the studied texts / articles, and identifying the discourse functions of the metaphor in different contexts. Experts in the domain claim that the metaphor can definitely make understanding of business concepts easier and rise the memorization of the business jargon and terminology. All things considered, we can claim that prior knowledge of the economic terminology, the further acquired learning permit our students to learn and retain the meaning of the economic metaphors more rapidly and efficiently.

We would like to emphasise the idea that metaphor is worth teaching and learning as “Metaphor can be viewed simply as text decoration; as a useful teaching device; as a central organising principle of all language; as a way of viewing and constructing new problem; as a fundamental basis for argument and storytelling” (Henderson, 1994, p. 343).

Bibliography

- Charteris-Black, Jonathan. Metaphor and Vocabulary Teaching in ESP Economics. In: *English for Specific Purposes*, Volume 19, Issue 2, June 2000, pp. 149-165.
- Dudley-Evans, Tony. *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Fiorito, Lorenzo. *Teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP)*. [online] Retrieved from: <http://www.usingenglish.com/teachers/articles/teaching-english-for-specific-purposes-esp.html> [accessed 26.12.2022]
- Harding, Keith. *English for Specific Purposes*, (Resource Books for Teachers), Ed. Allan Maley, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018
- Henderson, W. Metaphor and Economics. In: *New Directions in Economic Methodology*, 1st edition, London, New York: Routledge, 1994, pp. 343-367.
- Hornby, A.S. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Hutchinson, Tom, Waters, Alan. *English for Specific Purposes: A learner-centered approach*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Hutchinson, Tom, Waters, Alan. *English for Specific Purposes: A learner-centered approach*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Lakoff, George. The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor. In: *Ortony, A. Metaphor and Thought*. Second Edition: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 202 – 252.
- Lakoff, George, Johnson, Mark. *Metaphors We Live by*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Mellinkoff, David. *The Language of the Law*. Boston, Little, Brown and Co., 1963.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. London, Penguin Books, 1976.
- Mass Media, Course Description, Community College of Philadelphia, [online] Retrieved from <https://www.ccp.edu/college-catalog/degree-programs/associate-arts-aa/mass-media> [accessed 15.11.2022]
- Schaffer, Jonathan. What Not to Multiply Without Necessity. In: *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 2015, Volume 93, Issue 4, pp. 644-664. [online] Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2014.992447> [accessed 5.01.2023]
- Schleppergrell, Mary, Bowman Brenda. *ESP: Teaching English for Specific Purposes*, Center for Applied Linguistics. Washington D.C., US Department of Education, 1986.
- Over 60 and Overlooked. In: *The Economist*, 2002, Aug. 8th [online] Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/business/2002/08/08/over-60-and-overlooked> [accessed 07.12.2022]
- Thorndike, Joseph. How 'Tax Ferrets' Revealed the Limits of Heavy-Handed Enforcement. In: *Forbes*, 2022, Jan. 10. [online] Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/taxnotes/2022/01/10/how-tax-ferrets-revealed-the-limits-of-heavy-handed-enforcement/?sh=614c540a2bf5> [accessed 07.12.2022]

Fouché, Gwladys. Iceland Is in The Heart of the Economic Storm. In: *The Guardian*, 2008, Oct. 6. [online] Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/profile/gwladysfouche> [accessed 07.12.2022]

Outside the law. In: *The Economist*, 2010, Nov. 25th [online] Retrieved from https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics?sotry_id=12607243&page=411 [accessed 07.12.2022]

Global growth is slowing, but not stopping—yet. In: *The Economist*, 2022, May 15th. [online] Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2022/05/15/global-growth-is-slowing-but-not-stopping-yet> [accessed 07.12.2022]

Farnham Newspaper Veteran Sir Ray Tindle Dies Aged 95. In: *BBC*, 2022, 19 April [online] Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-surrey-61153651> [accessed 08.12.2022]