

THE CONCEPT OF FEAR IN THE ROMANIAN AND ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGY

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Abstract: *Phraseological units present great interest for linguacultural studies as they reveal the worldview of the people speaking a given language. The present article is an attempt to apply the Theory of Conceptual Metaphor to the analysis of idiomatic phraseological units of the Romanian and English languages. It has already been established that most of the idioms reflect in their form some cultural and historical information that is known to the native bearers of the language. At*

the same time, we believe that there is a group of idioms that can be analysed taking into account the conceptual metaphor that is of a universal nature. To this end, the notion of cognitive analysis will be introduced and finally, we will carry out a comparative culture-oriented analysis of English and Romanian phraseological units denoting 'fear' trying to identify the conceptual metaphor underlying the idiom.

Key words: *phraseology, figurative, non-figurative phraseological unit, conceptual metaphor.*

Introduction. The article aims to identify how the concept of 'fear' is conceptualized in Romanian and English phraseology, as well as to determine whether one can speak of universality or, rather, specificity of such constructions. The study is based on the assumption that human emotions are universal, but the ways emotivity is expressed linguistically varies, depending on social and cultural factors. In this article, we will identify the conceptual metaphors that underlie the phraseological units expressing fear in both Romanian and English.

Theoretical background and key concepts. Although, the study of emotions generally falls under the scope of psychology, they also present interest for linguists in terms of linguistic means used by individuals to express their inner experiences. To this end, Shakhovsky (1987) emphasizes that emotions are a psychological category, while emotivity is a linguistic one. The scientist distinguishes two semiotic systems of emotions – body language and verbal language. It has been established that the primary semiotic system predominates over the secondary one (verbal) in the speed, directness, reliability, the level of sincerity and quality of expressing emotions. As a rule, the verbal expression of emotions is subjective. Thus, the same emotion is expressed by different individuals in different ways due to numerous factors. Traditionally, it is considered that emotions are universal, but the ways they are expressed in various cultures differ, being determined by social and cultural characteristics, therefore, we refer to them a culturally-specific (depending on a variety of factors, such as culture, period of time, social class, etc.).

On the other hand, a phraseological unit (PhU) is often defined as a cluster of cultural information, which reveals the national character of the people (Telija, 2014; Liu, 2017). PhUs depict the life of a nation, its values

and beliefs, and their meaning cannot be determined in the absence of background knowledge of native speakers (Caldas-Coulthard, van Leeuwen, 2003). PhUs often convey elements of a nation's worldview, making reference to a specific cultural context or situation and convey the speaker's attitude to certain phenomena.

Human emotions play an important role in the formation of PhUs, which are at the same time figurative and nationally marked linguistic units. The analysis of PhUs depicting human emotions makes it possible to understand the culture and traditions of the nation internally, as well as to study the language from the linguacultural point of view. Language images embodied in phraseological system, being national ways of world perception, are based on the general logical and psychological grounds. Their explication helps to reveal the mechanism of cultural perception of extra-linguistic reality and on the other hand, to discover the immanent laws of language as a system of signs, which are responsible for the internal organization of phraseological system.

Another concept that is important for this study is that of conceptual metaphor, originating from cognitive linguistics. Generally speaking, the main interest of cognitive linguistics may be divided into two main areas: cognitive semantics and cognitive approaches to grammar. We are particularly interested in the first one, which is primarily concerned with investigating the relationship between experience, the conceptual system and the semantic structure encoded by language. In the cognitive approach, meaning is perceived as a way of shaping the world – it is dynamic and flexible, as a result of which language is not a stable structure. Moreover, in the cognitive view, meaning is experientially grounded and, as a consequence, language does not directly reflect the world, but rather reflects our unique human construal of the world which is subjective and experience-dependent. It is then believed that we can only talk about what we can perceive and conceive, and these things and phenomena derive from our embodied experience.

According to cognitive linguists, the conceptual metaphor is not a purely linguistic figure, it is rather a part of our ordinary, conventional way of conceptualising the world, and it is present not only in poetry (as classical theories claimed), but it may be seen in all spheres of linguistic expression and communication. In the cognitive view, the mechanism of

metaphorisation is considered to form the basis of thinking, and the metaphor itself is its more or less conventionalised expression (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). In other words, metaphor is held to be a phenomenon which provides a link between two domains of knowledge – the source domain and the target domain. The model of two domains is based on two assumptions: first, understanding one domain in terms of another is a basic cognitive mechanism of human mind, and, second, the process of metaphorisation is grounded in experience. Our conceptualisation of reality is to a large extent conditioned by the nature and physiology of human body and the interaction with its surrounding (Johnson 1987), which may explain the existence of the same or similar conceptual metaphors in different, even unrelated languages.

The cognitive theory of metaphor is frequently exploited in contemporary research on phraseology. In the cognitive approach to the analysis of phraseological expressions, the lexical layer of an idiom is used as a means to retrace a conceptual metaphor that motivates it, which, in turn, enables to reach the cognitive structure of concepts functioning in the human mind.

The linguistic interest in the world of emotions is to a large extent focused on cognitive analyses of figurative expressions grounded in metaphor and metonymy (e.g. Baxter 1992, Kövecses 1990, 2000). Many of them are based on the theory that language that we use is rooted in metaphor, and the analysis of its lexical layer makes it possible to discover and formalise the scenarios of mental experiences that underlay their lexical signs, i.e. the emotion models which are associated with particular lexemes in human minds. The research on the conceptualization of emotions in different languages, focusing e.g. on the tendencies in the use of metaphors and metonymies in the language of emotions, provide better and better knowledge of structuring emotion concepts in different languages. The greatest challenge in this field of research seems to be establishing whether there are any cultural (social, economic, political etc.) conditions that may influence the relevant changes in the conceptualisation of emotions, and whether it is possible to point to any regularities or tendencies that would govern these changes.

Materials and methods of investigation. The quest for phraseological expressions related to the subcategory of ‘fear’ from the

category of negative emotions resulted in a collection of PhUs, which have been examined for their accordance with basic indicators of idiomaticity. Thus, according to A. Wray (2005), PhUs are considered idiomatic if they meet the following criteria:

- they have a special meaning different from that of their components;
- they have an unusual structure that would be difficult to generate by rule;
- they have a specific functional role that is partly realised by their (precise) form;
- they have preferential internal associations;
- they constitute partially fixed, partially open frames.

Additionally, it was ensured that the PhUs have a conceptual metaphor as a source of their motivation.

All in all, we have selected a total of 101 PhUs depicting ‘fear’ in both Romanian (61) and English (40). The PhUs have been taken from both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, in particular, the Romanian explanatory dictionary (Dicționar explicativ al limbii române), Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms, Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms and English Idioms and Idiomatic Expressions, online bilingual dictionary www.hallo.ro.

Results and discussion. While working on the corpus for this study, our main focus was to identify the phraseological units depicting ‘fear’, bearing elements of this concept either in form or meaning. Thus, we identified that the emotion of ‘fear’ can be depicted by numerous PhUs that are based on the following conceptual metaphors: <FEAR IS COLD>, <FEAR IS A PENETRATING SUBSTANCE>, <FEAR IS SPEECHLESS>, <FEAR IS A LIVING BEING>, <FEAR IS DISRUPTION IN FUNCTIONING OF ONE’S BODY>, <FEAR IS A CHANGE IN ONE’S FACE COLOUR>.

Consider the following examples:

<FEAR IS COLD>

Romanian idioms: *a băga pe cineva în friguri/ fiori; a-i trece (cuiva) un șarpe (rece) prin sân; a-i îngheța (cuiva) sângele în vine; a-l strânge (pe cineva) în spate (de frig sau de frică); a-l trece (pe cineva) fiorii / răcorile; a-l trece pe cineva cu rece și cu cald; a-i se slei cuiva sângele în vine; a fi cu gheața în spate, a fi paralizat de frică; etc.*

English idioms: *break out in cold sweat; frozen with horror; frozen to the spot; make your blood run cold; my stomach turned to ice; go hot and cold; have cold feet; etc.*

<FEAR IS A PENETRATING SUBSTANCE>

Romanian idioms: *a fi / a umbla cu frica în spate (sân); a băga cuiva frica în oase; a intra frica (sau groaza, spaima) în cineva (sau în oasele, în inima cuiva); a fi (sau a sta) cu grija (sau cu frica) în spate; cu frica-n suflet; a fi cuprins de frică (de spaimă, de groază); a fi cu (a avea, a intra cuiva) un cui în inimă; a-i trece (cuiva) un șarpe (rece) prin sân; a-l trece (pe cineva) fiorii;*

English idioms: *put the fear of God into someone, strike fear/ terror into somebody's heart, be seized with fear, be gripped by fear, (have) butterflies in stomach, send chills down one's spine, etc. be paralysed with fear, etc.*

<FEAR IS SPEECHLESS>

Romanian idioms: *a muți de frică, a-i pieri (sau a-și pierde) graiul, a-i pieri (cuiva) glasul (sau graiul, piuitul) ori a-i pieri cuvintele de pe buze, etc.*

English idioms: *tongue-tied, stuck dumb with fear, etc.*

<FEAR IS A LIVING BEING>

Romanian idioms: *frica are ochii mari.*

English idioms: *fear feeds upon fear, fear has a quick ear, fear has magnifying eyes, fear has a hundred eyes, the eyes of fear see danger everywhere, etc.*

<FEAR IS DISRUPTION IN FUNCTIONING OF ONE'S BODY>

Romanian idioms: *a-i bate inima de frică, a i se tăia cuiva genunchii, a dormi iepurește / ca iepurii, a i se face (cuiva) inima cât un purice, a-i veni inima la loc, a fi mai mult mort (decât viu), a i se face (ori a i se ridica etc.) părul măciucă, a i se face cuiva pielea de găină (sau de găscă), a i se tăia inima, a i se strânge cuiva inima, a i se tăia răsufllarea, a-i țâțâi cuiva inima, a i se zbârli părul în cap, a i se sui părul în vârful capului, a-l furnica pe la spate, etc.*

English idioms: *give one goose bumps, make the hairs on the back of one's neck stand up, have bated breath, be a bundle of nerves, have one's heart in one's mouth, one's heart misses a beat, hold one's breath, shake like a leaf, weak at the knees, get/ have the jitters, etc.*

<FEAR IS A CHANGE IN ONE'S FACE COLOUR>

Romanian idioms: *a se îngălbeni de frică, a înverzi (despre oameni) de frică, a nu mai avea (nici) o picătură de sânge în obraz, a se face alb ca varul, etc.*

English idioms: *blanch with fear, to turn white as a ghost, a ghastly whiteness spreads over one's face, as pale as a ghost, white as snow, as white as a sheet, be yellow-bellied, have a yellow streak down one's back, etc.*

The summary table below represents the results obtained comparatively.

	Total number of idioms	Romanian	English
FEAR			
<FEAR IS COLD>	32	22	10
<FEAR IS SPEECHLESS>	12	9	3
<FEAR IS A PENETRATING SUBSTANCE>	13	9	4
<FEAR IS A LIVING BEING >	6	1	5
<FEAR IS DISRUPTION IN FUNCTIONING OF ONE'S BODY>	26	16	10
<FEAR IS A CHANGE IN ONE'S FACE COLOUR>	12	4	8

Table 1. Comparative results for Romanian and English phraseological units depicting *fear*.

All of the conceptual metaphors, with the exception of <FEAR IS A LIVING BEING>, work for both Romanian and English, which means that in both languages, the fear is expressed in similar ways. This can be explained by the fact that the feeling of fear has some general effects on the human body, such as heart palpitation, unexplained sweating, clenching of the fist and teeth, change in eye movements and face expressions and a numbed thought process. These effects are observed by all of us when we sense a dangerous stimulus. It is one of the negative emotions and is described as the survival mechanism used by the body when it perceives threat. Therefore, it is natural that in both Romanian and English, fear is expressed through the same conceptual metaphors.

Next, the Romanian and English idioms that seemed to represent the

same conceptual entailments were collated in order to establish links of equivalence between them, and, finally, to find out which expressions do not have their counterparts in the other language. Considering the vast number of examples, in this article, we will analyze only the similarities and differences of the PhUs based on the conceptual metaphor <FEAR IS COLD>.

In this subcategory, we identified a few examples of PhUs that more or less render the same meaning and connotations and have full equivalents in translation, i.e. *a-i îngheța (cuiva) sângele în vine* translated by *make one's blood run cold*; *a-l trece pe cineva cu rece și cu cald* – *go hot and cold*; etc.

However, a closer look at the PhUs in this subcategory, reveals that they often stir different associations and, in translation, they will be rendered by a more general / specific PhU. Let us consider the example of the Romanian phraseological unit *a băga pe cineva în friguri/ fiori* (literally, *giving chills to someone*) which is translated by a more general PhU *to scare someone to death*. Thus, in Romanian, you scare someone to the extent that s/he is shivering. In translation, the cultural specificity of the Romanian phraseological unit is lost.

In the case of the idiom *a-i trece (cuiva) un șarpe (rece) prin sân* (literally, *have a (cold) snake touch a person's bosom*), which is translated by *being touched/ penetrated by fear*, we identify that there is a false English cognate with the same component (snake) *to warm/ cherish a serpent/ viper/ snake in one's bosom*, which may be misleading in translation. The English phrase *a snake in one's bosom* refers to a person whom one has treated well and taken care of but turned out to be traitorous, untrustworthy, or ungrateful. It has at its basis elements of Aesopic fables, reiterated in Shakespeare's works. While the Romanian PhU is based on the association of snake with something unpleasant and cold that touches a person's vulnerable spot unexpectedly.

Another distinctive difference between the Romanian and English PhUs from this subcategory is the fact that in Romanian, the *cold* is represented by lexical units of a lesser intensity, see the use of such compounds as *friguri, fiori*, while in English, the components are *frozen, ice, cold*, which imply a stronger intensity. The same can be said with regard to the verbs used in the structure of the PhUs, in Romanian we have

a trece (to pass), which means something temporary, of a short duration, while in English, the verbs are more durative, i.e. *turned into ice, make run cold, have cold feet*, etc.

Conclusion. Most of the Romanian and English phraseological units analysed in this study are generally anthropomorphic, representing the human being, parts of its body, the body's reaction to the fear and human perception of fear. Additionally, we have also noticed several PhUs included within the subcategory of <FEAR IS CHANGE IN ONE'S FACE COLOR> contain images associated with the symbolism of color, mostly white in English, yellow/ green and white in Romanian.

Based on the above findings, it may be said that in both language communities, there is a common perception of the world, which has been proved by the common functioning of the majority of conceptual schemata. On the other hand, the differences in phraseology, on its lexical or grammatical level, as well as in references to various historical or social facts, etc., prove that each language is in fact a unique phenomenon, very often inexpressible by means of another language.

The examples cited above may be interpreted as clear evidence that in the English and Romanian languages the conceptualisation of certain phenomena (in this case, *fear*) is comparable on the level of general metaphorical patterns, but in the specific realisations of these patterns (i.e. on the level of individual idiomatic expressions) it is far more culture-specific, which gives the scientists the possibility to extract more cultural information from these PhUs. Additionally, it should be mentioned that in translation, they would require special care and attention.

Furthermore, the linguistic data obtained in this way could be exploited to examine the cultures of various language communities to find out to what extent and how the various differences existing between cultures are manifested in their languages. This, however, exceeds the scope of purely linguistic investigation, and would require a deeper sociological and anthropological insight.

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