

TRANSLATING ECONOMIC COLOUR IDIOMS AS A WAY OF DEVELOPING CROSS-CULTURAL ECONOMIC DISCOURSE

Marina-Cristiana ROTARU

Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest, Romania

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is two-fold: first, it aims to investigate to what extent colour idioms in economic language can generate discourse. As metaphorical constructions, economic colour idioms can help conceptualize experience by means of the conceptual metaphor. They also help frame economic reality linguistically, thus developing discourse-generating power. Second, it seeks to indicate the degree to which the translation of these idioms can accommodate the linguistic forms of the reality illustrated by the economic discourse in the target language. The numerous calques used in the translation of economic colour idioms indicate that new cultural forms disseminated by English language worldwide have been linguistically assimilated and accommodated in other languages, contributing to the process of acculturation and the development of cross-cultural discourse.

Keywords: economic colour idioms, conceptual metaphor, international calque, schemata, accommodation, assimilation, acculturation, cross-cultural discourse

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to demonstrate whether colour economic idioms can develop discourse-generating power. Furthermore, the paper aims to determine if the translation of these idioms can accommodate a foreign reality in the target language, thus contributing to the establishment of a cross-cultural economic discourse.

Globalization has merged markets and led to an increasing interdependence of countries and economies. This interdependence is also manifest at linguistic level. As the new *lingua franca*, English has established itself as the main language of communication in the international economic environment and influenced economic terminology throughout the world, many other languages borrowing English terms in order to bridge the gap between international and local realities. Sometimes, these linguistic loans have turned into calques, an indication that alien terms have become accommodated in the host language. These calques often underline a tension between the hegemonic culture, the Anglo-Saxon culture in this case, and the target culture, the Romanian culture, a tension caused by the pressure experienced by the host culture and the host language in their efforts to keep pace with newly emerging realities that make themselves felt almost instantly.

2. From idioms to discourse through the conceptual metaphor

The first step in dealing with idioms in general is being able to identify them in the text. Some idioms give themselves away because they “violate truth conditions”ⁱ. Idioms such as “the black sheep of the family”, “scream blue murder”, “be in the pink” or “give somebody the cold shoulder” violate truth conditions. And so do economic colour

idioms such as “black labour”, “golden hello”, “to be in the red”, “green jobs”, “white collars” or “grey market”, for example.

Idioms also give themselves away by the fact they “enter into lexical sets which are different from those of their individual words”ⁱⁱ. Let us have a look at the economic colour idiom “golden parachute”. The idiom can form collocations such as “to be given a golden parachute”, “to get a golden parachute”, “golden parachute deals”, “a \$ 55 million golden parachute”ⁱⁱⁱ. These collocations are different from those formed by the individual words of the idiom. For instance, “parachute” collocates with verbs such as “pack, open or fail to open”: “to pack a parachute”, “the parachute opened” or “the parachute failed to open”. “Parachute” also collocates with nouns such as “descent, jump, drop” as in “a parachute jump” or “a parachute descent”^{iv}. The adjective “golden” collocates with the verbs “be, gleam, look, turn” as in “to gleam golden” or “to turn golden” or with the adverbs “faintly” or “softly” as in “the faintly golden afternoon light”^v. But the idiom “golden parachute” as a unit of meaning is not connected in any way with the above-mentioned verbs, nouns, or adverbs.

As with any newly coined linguistic terms, economic colour idioms have emerged in response to the need to give linguistic form to various economic realities. Discourse understood as “ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations and structures of the material world, ‘the mental world’ of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world”^{vi} represents these economic realities. In addition, discourse can be interpreted as “spoken or written language use”^{vii}, the language component of discourse being thus underlined. Given the dialogical relationship between language and society, language influences discourse and discourse reflects back on language.

If discourse is language use, then discourse can be marked by its most distinct characteristics: “features of vocabulary” since “discourses ‘word’ or ‘lexicalise’ the world in particular ways”^{viii}, or metaphors^{ix} by means of the so-called “conceptual metaphor”. The conceptual metaphor is defined as “a mapping (in the mathematical sense) from a source domain [...] to a target domain [...]”^x. Mappings “are sets of conceptual correspondences” according to which elements in one domain “correspond systematically” to elements in a different domain^{xi}. The conceptual metaphor is thus a correspondence between elements belonging to two different cognitive domains, a source domain and a target domain. The source domain generally circumscribes our own experience of the surrounding reality and includes “literal entities, attributes, processes and relationships, linked semantically and apparently stored together on the mind” while the target domain can be understood as an abstract projection of the source domain, deriving its makeup “from the source domain through the metaphorical link or ‘conceptual metaphor’”^{xii}.

These metaphorical mappings are an inherent attribute of human thought since humans “typically conceptualize the non-physical in terms of the physical” and “the less clearly delineated in terms of the more clearly delineated”^{xiii}. The conceptual metaphor can function if it is “natural”, that is “motivated by the structure of our experience”^{xiv}. Without this natural ingredient, mapping knowledge is not possible. Furthermore, a domain can work as a “source domain for a metaphor” if it is “understood independent of the metaphor”^{xv}. Colours can function as a source domain for a metaphor because in their literal meaning they represent physical properties of the material world. Furthermore, colour metaphors, as they manifest in economic

colour idioms, can function as “conceptual metaphors” because they help decode one domain of experience in terms of another domain of experience.

The tables below aim to illustrate the conceptual correspondences between a source domain and a target domain by means of the conceptual metaphor implicit in economic colour idioms.

SOURCE DOMAIN	TARGET DOMAIN
black economy black labour black market black marketer black payment	Illegality unlawfulness

Table 1. Black standing for illegality

In the economic discourse, “black” is associated with illegal economic activities, businesses conducted without official approval (see Table 1). But “black” can establish other connections with economic realities, such as the correspondence between “black” and “profitability” in idioms such as “be in/ remain in/ return to the black” (see Table 2).

SOURCE DOMAIN	TARGET DOMAIN
be in/ remain in/ return to the black blue chip(s) blue-chip company blue-chip stocks	profitability

Table 2. Black and blue standing for profitability

The concept of “profitability” is also expressed by colour “blue” as in “blue chip(s)”, meaning “the shares of the best known companies on the stock market, which are considered to be a safe investment”^{xvi}. In addition, “blue”, in its metaphorical use, refers to “manual work” (see Table 6). The notion of “unprofitability” is rendered by colour “red” in the economic metaphors “be in/ remain in/ return to the red” or “red ink” (see Table 3), meaning “operating at a loss”, “being in debt”^{xvii}. Furthermore, “red” in its metaphorical use, establishes another correspondence with the concept of “bureaucracy” in the idiom “red tape”^{xviii} (see Table 9).

“Golden”, used metaphorically (see Table 4), establishes correspondences with the notion of “financial advantages” or “financial benefits” given to people for certain purposes: either in order to convince them to keep working for a company rather than leave for another (golden handcuffs), or as a sort of compensation for people who retire or when they are forced to retire or give up their job (golden handshake, golden goodbye) or as benefits for young employees in order to make a job more attractive to well-prepared members of the workforce (golden hello) or as substantial sums of money offered, by contract, to senior managers who have to give up their jobs in case of a takeover (golden parachute). But the metaphorical “golden” can establish new economic correspondences as in “the golden share” (see Table 9), which illustrates a correspondence with the notion of “veto power” used by the holder of a company in order to block changes that they do not support^{xix}.

SOURCE DOMAIN	TARGET DOMAIN
be in/ remain in/ return to the red red ink	unprofitability

Table 3. Red standing for unprofitability

SOURCE DOMAIN	TARGET DOMAIN
golden handcuff golden parachute golden handshake golden hello golden goodbye/ golden farewell	Financial advantages/ financial benefits

Table 4. Golden standing for financial advantages

SOURCE DOMAIN	TARGET DOMAIN
green chip(s) green-chip company green collar(s) green consumerism green economy green job(s) green market green marketing	environmental concern/ environmentally friendly approaches

Table 5. Green standing for environmental concerns

The metaphorical “green” (see Table 5) establishes correspondences with the target domain of environmental concerns, illustrating the much-heralded ecological approaches to economic activities, which encompass not only the ecological strategies of various businesses and industries, but also the environmentally-friendly attitudes of consumers.

SOURCE DOMAIN	TARGET DOMAIN
blue collar(s) blue-collar job(s) blue-collar worker(s)	manual work
pink collar(s) pink-collar job(s)	low-paid jobs, usually done by women
white collar(s) white-collar job(s) white-collar worker(s)	office work

Table 6. Blue, pink and white standing for types of work

Other colours, such as blue, pink and white, in their metaphorical use, help differentiate between manual labour and office labour (blue collars versus white collars) or between better-paid jobs and lower-paid jobs (white-collar jobs versus pink-collar jobs). Sometimes, they even discriminate between jobs done mainly by men or women (pink-collar jobs are activities performed mainly by women^{xx}).

SOURCE DOMAIN	TARGET DOMAIN
black knight	malevolent investment
grey knight	speculative investment
white knight	non-hostile investment

Table 7. Goal-dependent types of investment

Colours black, grey and white help illustrate various kinds of investments depending on the investors’ goals (see Table 7). Some investments are made by

people or economic entities that offer low prices and want to buy a company in spite of the company's opposition. Such investments are made by the so-called black knights^{xxi}. A grey knight is "a third company or person" potentially interested in the acquisition of a company. Such investors are "grey" because "it is not known if they will be good or bad for the company"^{xxii}. At the other end of the colour spectrum, white appears in the idiom "a white knight" to define an investor "that rescues a company from being bought by another at too low a price"^{xxiii}.

Furthermore, grey can also establish other correspondences with that indeterminate area between what is official, acknowledged and what is not (see Table 8). "Grey market", meaning "the buying and selling of goods that have not been obtained from an official supplier, usually at a lower price than the official price"^{xxiv} establishes a correspondence with the target domain represented by what can be regarded as "unofficial", but not necessarily illegal, economic activity.

SOURCE DOMAIN	TARGET DOMAIN
grey market	unofficial
grey market prices	

Table 8. Grey for unofficial, but not illegal, economic activities

Except colour green, all the other colours used metaphorically in economic idioms, including the odd "pink", establish more than one correspondence between a source domain and a target domain. The metaphorical "pink" forms the idiom "the pink slip" (see Table 9), with its variations "to be given the pink slip" or "to be pink-slipped" and establishes a connection with the concepts of "redundancy", "dismissal" or "unemployment".

SOURCE DOMAIN	TARGET DOMAIN
golden share	veto power
pink slip/ to be given the pink slip/to be pink-slipped	redundancy, dismissal, unemployment
red tape	bureaucracy

Table 9. Other correspondences

The examples presented in the nine tables above help reach the conclusion that the conceptual metaphor is not rigid, but characterized by semantic dynamism. For instance, "black" in its metaphorical use, can refer to the notion of "illegality" by means of idioms such as "black labour" or "black market", but it can equally refer to the notion of "profitability" as in "be in/ remain in/ return to the black". The more various the source domain is, the more diverse the target domain becomes.

The capacity of discourse to influence language and the ability of language to mirror discourse allow new economic realities to be acknowledged linguistically. Illegal economic activities are linguistically framed as "black economy". A low carbon, resource efficient economy is synthesized as "green economy" while economic activities which can unofficially develop on a tax-free basis are described as "grey economy". Language is highly inventive and expressive in mirroring the surrounding world. It remains vigilant in spotting economic realities, even in their emerging stages, and coining them. For instance, a new term has been created to describe the economy based on digital services: the white economy^{xxv}. The highly polluting industries such as mining or the cement industry are described as "the brown economy", the industries

based on recycling are coined “the blue economy” while the state-controlled economy, characteristic of communist regimes, is termed “the red economy”^{xxvi}. Thus, new forms of reality give birth to new notions by means of which people conceptualize experience.

3. A model for conceptualizing experience

How do people conceptualize experience? Conceptualizing experience depends on the acquisition of word-meanings. Andrew Goatly puts forward a system for language acquisition drawing on Hilary Putnam’s theory of ostensive reference and Jean Piaget’s concepts of “accommodation” and “assimilation”. The theory of ostensive reference maintains that meanings of words can be acquired by *ostension* (by being shown) rather than by “definitional convention”. Hence, people are shown various examples or “exemplars (prototypes)” from which they develop “a concept applicable to other phenomena”^{xxvii}. Furthermore, Goatly underlines that language acquisition by *ostension* implies that “the semantic system is accommodated to experience”^{xxviii}. In order to illustrate how our mind absorbs experience, Goatly makes use of Piaget’s processes of “assimilation” and “accommodation”. In language acquisition, people use schemata or common models for organizing knowledge. Assimilation occurs when people use schemata to deal with a new situation. For example, a child seeing a plane for the first time may call it a bird because the plane is assimilated with the schema of the bird that the child has stored in his memory: a flying creature with wings. So, the child assimilates the plane with the bird, but the concept “bird” is too broad since not everything that has got two wings and flies is a bird. When the child is made aware of and understands the differences between a bird and a plane, the process of accommodation takes place because the original schema has changed “in response to changes in the environment”^{xxix}.

By analogy, the various correspondences established between a source domain and a target domain can be assimilated and then accommodated. Economic idioms incorporating the colour black do not establish correspondence only with the concept of “illegality”, but also with the notion of “profitability”. When learners become aware that colour “black”, for instance, can establish correspondences with more than one notion and when the differences characterizing these notions are understood and incorporated in the schemata, accommodation occurs.

4. Developing a cross-cultural discourse

Economic colour idioms are translated into Romanian mainly by calques, but equivalence and natularisation are also used, as illustrated by the table below:

COLOUR ECONOMIC IDIOMS	TRANSLATION PROCEDURE
black economy	economie neagră (calque) economie subterană (equivalence)
black market	piață neagră (calque)
black marketer	comerciant pe piața neagră (calque)
black payment	plată la negru (calque)
black labour	muncă la negru (calque)
black knight	investitor ostil (equivalence)
be in the black	a avea profit/ a face profit (equivalence)
blue chip	acțiune de calitate I/ acțiune lichidă (equivalence)
blue-chip stocks	acțiune de calitate I (equivalence)

	acțiune blue chip (calque and borrowing)
blue-chip company	societate comercială foarte puternică (equivalence) companie blue-chip (calque and borrowing) blue-chips-uri (naturalisation)
blue collar	guler albastru (calque)
blue-collar worker	lucrător, muncitor (equivalence)
golden share	acțiune de aur (calque)
golden handcuff	câtușe de aur (calque)
golden parachute	parașută de aur (calque)
golden handshake	compensație generoasă (equivalence)
golden hello	bonus de bun venit (equivalence)
golden farewell/ golden goodbye	plată compensatorie la pensionare sau la concediere (equivalence)
green economy	economie verde (calque) economie ecologică (calque and equivalence)
green-chip company	întreprindere ecologică (equivalence) companie verde (equivalence)
green consumerism	consumerism verde (calque) consumerism ecologic (calque and equivalence)
green jobs	locuri de muncă în industriile ecologice (equivalence)
green marketing	marketing verde (borrowing and calque) marketing ecologic (borrowing and equivalence)
grey market	piață gri (calque) piață neoficială (equivalence)
grey market prices	prețuri pe piața gri (calque) cursuri pe piața neoficială (equivalence)
grey knight	cavaler gri (calque)
red ink	deficit (equivalence)
red tape	birocrație (equivalence)
be in the red	a fi în deficit/ a avea pierderi (equivalence)
white collar	funcționar (equivalence)
white knight	cavaler alb (calque)

Table 10. Procedures used in the translation of economic colour idioms

The considerable use of calques in the translation of economic colour idioms accounts for lexical gaps present in Romanian as far as economic language is concerned. Interestingly, these calques also appear in other languages, so they become international calques, indicative of lexical gaps elsewhere. For instance, “black market” is translated as “mercado negro” in Spanish and Portuguese, “Schwarzmarkt” in German, “marché noir” in French or “mercato nero” in Italian. “Blue collar” is translated as “blauer Kragen” in German, “col bleu” in French, “colletto blu” in Italian or “cuelto azul” in Spanish. Sometimes, calques appear together with borrowings, forming couplets, as in the translation of “blue-chip companies”: “empresas blue chip” in Portuguese, “società blue chip” in Italian or “blue chip Unternehmen” in German.

Given that English is the new *lingua franca*, proof of the political, economic and cultural hegemony of the Anglo-Saxon world, it is no surprise that such calques have become absorbed in other languages. Due to its world status, the English language disseminates both linguistic forms and the meanings attached to them. The rapid rhythm of change, globalization with its almost instantaneous effects, the dynamism of the English language and its capacity for synthesis help English coin new terms for

new realities and the hegemonic position of the English language in the world help it disseminate the new terminology at a very fast pace that other languages cannot keep up with. Consequently, the newly-coined terms become accommodated in other languages, often in the form of calques. The newly-introduced calques import not only the linguistic structure of the hegemonic culture, but also the meanings attached to these structures, which are cultural aspects. The source domain and the target domain in the dominant culture are transferred to the less dominant cultures and the original correspondences established between the two domains are maintained. The acquisition of cultural aspects of the dominant culture by the less dominant culture indicates that acculturation takes place. Linguistic acculturation is a key dimension of English as the modern *lingua franca* and some translation procedures help this dimension manifest in other cultures. Consequently, the economic discourse framed by the English language crosses linguistic borders and gets absorbed by other cultures, thus becoming cross-cultural.

5. Conclusions

Linguistic influences are a natural phenomenon. English language as the new *lingua franca* influences other languages in the same way in which languages like Latin or French influenced English before. Due to the hegemonic position of the Anglo-Saxon culture in the world today, English has become the language for international communication in numerous domains, including the economic one. Hence, new economic realities are first encoded in the English language before they are given linguistic form in other languages. Given the numerous and rapid changes that characterize the modern world and the linguistic supremacy of English in various spheres of human activity, the newly-coined English terms penetrate other languages at a pace which is faster than the ability of other languages to coin terms of their own in response to international changes. This partly explains the use of numerous calques in the translation of various economic colour idioms. As metaphorical constructions, economic colour idioms create mappings of the economic environment via the conceptual metaphor, which establishes connections between a source domain (a domain of factual elements) and a target domain (the abstract domain of concepts). The English language disseminates these elements and the meanings associated with them worldwide. Some of these elements are first assimilated and then accommodated into other languages, contributing to the process of acculturation and to the development of cross-cultural economic discourse.

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