

Sports Metaphors in Business – a cross-linguistic Perspective

Veronica VASILE¹

¹ “ARTIFEX” University of Bucharest

Correspondence: Veronica VASILE, “ARTIFEX” University of Bucharest, Economu Cezărescu street, no. 47, 6th sector, Bucharest, Romania, E-mail: vera.iconica@yahoo.com

Abstract

The aim of the present paper is to look into business metaphors from a cross-linguistic perspective (English and Romanian). It will focus on sports-related metaphors, in an attempt to prove that there is a common cognitive background underlying natural languages, which licenses the occurrence of similar concepts and mental schemas in fairly unrelated languages (such as English and Romanian). Following the conceptual (conventional) metaphor model proposed by Lakoff & Johnson (1980/2003), the paper discusses two related structural metaphors: “Business is a sports competition” and “Companies are players”, which are richly supported by authentic examples, taken from the sports and business press.

Key words conceptual metaphors, business, sports, football, boxing, racing

JEL Codes: D83, Z13

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Introduction - Conceptual metaphors (theoretical framework). Literature review

Metaphors are motivated linguistic signs. Based mostly on linguistic evidence, Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) find that *conventional (conceptual) metaphors* are *not* arbitrary linguistic expressions. They are based on our physical and cultural experience, so they should be understood and analyzed at the (cross-linguistic) level of *cognitive semantics*, rather than that of pragmatics (stylistics) or cultural studies.

According to the two authors, there is a metaphorical dimension in the most basic *concepts* we use by means of language. Contrary to common belief, metaphor is not just a figure of speech (a rhetorical device). The nature and meaning of metaphor is far more complex, because “our ordinary *conceptual system*”, which “plays a central role in defining our everyday realities, is fundamentally *metaphorical* in nature.” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 4). This conceptual system, of which we are generally *unaware*, but which shapes the way we think about the world, becomes visible at the level of ordinary language (in common expressions, idioms, clichés, etc). The major cognitive pattern at play here is *reification*, which relates *abstract* concepts to our *concrete* experience of the world. Thus, creating a conceptual (or conventional) metaphor implies a *transfer* of features from a *source* (or *donor*) domain, which is more *common* or *concrete* for language users, to a *target* (more *abstract*) domain.

Lakoff & Johnson (1980/2003) identify three main types of *conceptual (conventional) metaphors*: *structural*, *orientational* and *ontological* metaphors.

Our direct experience with *concrete objects* (especially *living bodies*) provides the foundation for a wide variety of *ontological* metaphors, which are ways of viewing events, processes, emotions, ideas, etc, as “*discrete entities* and substances of a uniform kind” (*idem*). For various cognitive and linguistic aims, we tend to “impose artificial boundaries that make experience *discrete*” (*ibid.*) (i.e. clearly limited in *space* and *time*). For instance, the rather abstract experience of the rising of prices can be metaphorically seen as an *entity*, by means of the noun *inflation* (or other similar nouns, such as *growth*, *boom*, etc). This gives us a way of talking about this type of abstract experience as materialized in the conceptual (ontological) metaphor *Inflation is a (living) entity* (e.g.: *Inflation* is lowering our standard of living. // *Inflation* is hacking us into a corner. // Buying land is the best way of dealing with *inflation*, etc) (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980/2003). In such examples, viewing inflation as an *entity* allows us to identify and describe it, quantify it, see it as an active *cause* and thus try to make sense of it.

The basic experience of human *spatial* orientation (up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, central-peripheral, deep-shallow) gives rise to the so-called *orientational* metaphors. In English, illustrations of such metaphors are, for instance, *More is Up / Less is Down* (e.g.: My income *rose* last year. // His income *fell* last year. // If you're too hot, turn the heat *down*, etc) and *Good is Up / Bad is Down* (e.g.: Things are looking *up*. // He does *high*-quality work. // We hit a *peak* last year, but it's been *downhill* ever since. // Things are at *an* all-time *high / low*). (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980/2003)

Structural metaphors (such as *Argument is War* or *Life is a Journey*) are cases where one (*abstract* or less familiar) concept is metaphorically *structured* in terms of another (more *concrete* or better known one).

The *analogy* between sports or games (as the *source* domain) and business activities (as the *target* domain) has led to the *structural* metaphors **BUSINESS IS A SPORTS COMPETITION** and **BUSINESS COMPANIES ARE PLAYERS**, which underpin a lot of English and Romanian phrases, collocations and idioms, used in *business*, but also in *everyday language*.

Competition is a central idea in both *sports* and *business*. Thus, sports metaphors are basically competition metaphors. However, most (if not all) sports metaphors are *not* used exclusively in business. Many of them are a common feature of *political language*, for instance (which is not surprising, since politics is another battling ground of antagonistic interests). Like all conventional (conceptual) metaphors, sports idioms have become *clichés*, which are naturally used in everyday language, both *written* (e.g. newspapers) and *spoken* (conversation), to describe arguments and conflict situations in various contexts.

The main purpose of this article is to emphasize the *cross-linguistic* relevance of such sports metaphors. Examples will be provided mostly for Romanian, since the English corpus is already well-documented and taken from reliable sources (see the bibliography and footnotes). English sports metaphors will be given a Romanian equivalent wherever possible and vice-versa. Where there is no equivalence between the two languages, a literal translation or similar expression will be provided, in order to clarify the (figurative) meaning of the linguistic item in question.

Romanian (online) business press is the main source of authentic examples.

1. Research methodology and data

Sports & war metaphors

It is obvious that many sports idioms are also metaphorical mappings of another *source* domain, namely *war*, which is extensively used in *sports* or *games* (as the *target* domain). Leafing through any sports newspaper or magazine provides us with rich material for the widespread *sports-as-war* metaphor. Here are just a few examples, taken from Romanian newspapers and sports-related websites:

- Antrenorul vrea să schimbe stilul echipei, mergînd pe un *contraatac-fulger*.
(The coach wants to change the team's game strategy, going for a *blitz defense*)
- Suporterii *au luat cu asalt / au invadat stadionul*.
(The supporters have *invaded the stadium / taken the stadium by storm*.)
- *Dinamo* a mai câștigat 2 puncte extreme de importante în *lupta pentru titlu*. (in *Gazeta Sporturilor*)
(En : *Dinamo* has won two very important points in its *fight for the title*).
- Torje poate fi următorul *transfer-bombă* al Ligii I. (in *ProSport*)
(Torje may be the next *bomb-transfer* (= surprise transfer) in the Premier League.)

Similar examples may be found in English and (most certainly) in many other languages, but we are not dealing with war metaphors here.¹

These *three* conceptually related *domains* (*war*, *sports* and *business*) share some essential common features:

- they are all *competitive* human activities (there are bound to be winners and losers in any competition)
- they are strongly *goal-oriented* - there is always a *stake* or *reward* at play (everyone stands to win something, even if they say that they are just there for the game)
- they are governed by previously established (legal and social) *rules* and *regulations*, which all participants must know and obey
- they usually require careful *planning* (*strategies* and *tactics*)
- they take *hard work*, but also some specific *skills* and *talents* (ambition, self-confidence, intelligence, self-discipline, physical and mental endurance, strong focus, etc)

¹ I have discussed *war metaphors* in *English and Romanian* in another article (listed in the bibliography).

Last, but certainly not least, *teamwork* is generally considered crucial for success in these fields. *Team spirit* is a core part of both sports and corporate business. Unlike war and more like sports, the business game is less violent and more concerned with the idea of fair play. Also like sports, business is a voluntary, exciting and challenging human activity.

War may therefore be considered the *source domain* underpinning both *sports* and *business* metaphors, with the semantic domain of sports / games as an *interface* between war and business. Linguistic evidence points to the fact that sport functions as a *source domain* for business and *not* the other way around: there are many sports terms, expressions and collocations which are metaphorically used in business, but few (if any) specific business terms used in sports and games.

2. Results and discussions

Sports metaphors in English and Romanian – some common examples

The sports lingo infuses many aspects of human life, including the business world. We often hear, for instance, that some project is a “slam dunk” (either a sure / certain thing, when we talk about a *future* project OR an amazing job / achievement, when we talk about the *past*) and many of us have attended informal “kick-off” meetings at work, at the *beginning* of a new project.

There are so many popular sports in the modern world and most of them are (highly) *competitive* ones, hence an abundance of sports-related metaphors.

Since companies have employees which work together (as a team) for the common goal of making a profit, it is hardly surprising that *team sports* have lent lots of idioms and expressions to the field of business. However, *individual sports* (like *boxing*) are also a rich source domain for business metaphors.

The most common examples are probably the verb *to train* (Ro: *a antrena, a instrui*) and its lexical family (*training, trainer / trainee*), the semantically related noun and verb (*to coach* (Ro: *antrenor, instructor*), but also the nouns *champion* (Ro: *campion*) and *player* (Ro: *jucător*), the latter being used especially in the *plural* and in the noun collocations *key players* or *niche players*:

– Transformări fără precedent pe piața asigurărilor – *Jucători* noi și primul RCA *de nișă* din istorie. (headline on www.profit.ro)

(Unprecedented changes on the insurance market – New *players* and the first *niche* car insurance in history)

– « *Campioni în Business* » este un program dedicat antreprenoriatului, care descoperă, promovează și premiază cei mai de succes antreprenori români.

(www.campioniinbusiness.ro)

(*Champions in Business* is an entrepreneurial program that discovers, promotes and rewards the most successful Romanian entrepreneurs.)

It may be argued of course that some Romanian sports-related metaphors (such as the ones above) are just *borrowings* or *loan translations* from English, which is after all a global language of economy, popular culture and sports. Even though this is obviously true in some cases, this borrowing of culturally similar expressions and idioms does *not* preclude the existence of a conceptual mapping between the source and the target domain in both languages. Quite to the contrary, it is clear evidence of it. In the absence of such metaphorical mappings, the expressions could not be understood in the target language (in this case, Romanian).

Additional evidence comes from some very popular sports in the United States (*baseball*) and United Kingdom (*cricket*), respectively. Both these sports are a rich source of set phrases and idioms in (British and American) English. Common examples from *baseball*² (American English) include: *ballpark* (= a rough estimate)³, *singles and doubles* (= small steps), *wheelhouse* (= someone’s area of expertise), *to knock it out of the park* (= to be a wild and/or unexpected success), *early innings* (= the early stages of a project or extended event)⁴. From *cricket* (British English): *stumped* (= confused, bewildered), *sticky wicket* (= an awkward situation), *it’s not cricket* (= unfair or unethical

² Apparently, *baseball* metaphors are so prolific in *American English* that *Wikipedia* has two different pages (articles) dedicated to this subject. See [English language idioms derived from baseball](#) and [baseball metaphors for sex](#).

³ In brackets, I have given only the *figurative* meaning of the expression, without getting into any technical details regarding the source domain (sports).

⁴ *Inning* is a technical term used both in *baseball* and *cricket*.

behavior), etc. Yet, despite the popularity of such sports metaphors in English, none of them has been transferred into Romanian, because the *source* domains (baseball, cricket) do *not* exist in this language.

Let us now consider other sports, which (unlike baseball or cricket) have gained worldwide popularity.

2.1. Ball games (European and American football, basketball, volleyball, tennis, etc)

Some of the most common words and expressions are borrowed from ball games, especially *football*.

For example, if things are going well for one of the teams (or companies) and we are in a position to take the next step, then we say that *the ball is in our court* (Ro: *Mingea este în terenul nostru*) or *the ball's in their court* (Ro: *Mingea este în terenul lor*), respectively. This phrase comes from either *tennis* or *basketball* (Allan, 2016). When the ball is “in *your* court,” it means that *you* have an advantage and are in control of the situation and the other team are waiting for you to make the next move:

- *Mingea era în terenul lor* înainte de criză, se mutau rapid dintr-o companie într-alta și asta pe salarii mult mai mari. (Mureșan, 2011)

(Before the crisis, *the ball was in their court* – they (i.e. IT specialists, computer programmers) moved rapidly from one company to another, for much higher salaries.)

When you cannot or are not allowed to take part in a project along with the other members of your team, you are (sitting) *on the bench* (Ro: *pe banca de rezerve*) or *on the sidelines* (Ro: *a sta / a rămâne pe bară*), which means that you are temporarily off the game, maybe waiting to get back in.

In many sports, the *bench* is the place where players sit when they are not taking part, but simply watching the game and *the sidelines* are the (white or colored) lines marking the outer boundaries of a sports field, where coaches and reserve players stay⁵:

- „... băncile europene mai mari *au rămas pe bară* deocamdată, la fel și cele americane.” (Pescaru, 2016)
(... the larger European banks are waiting *on the sidelines* for the time being and so are the American ones.)

Depending on the company you are working for, you may be a player (i.e. employee) in the *Major* (or *Premier*) *League* (Ro: *Prima Ligă*) or, if you're not so lucky, in the *Bush League* (Ro: *Liga 2-7, joc de amatori*), an informal expression which refers to smaller companies, which are usually viewed as mediocre, insignificant or even unethical (Ashcraft, 2014). In most sports (football, baseball, etc), a “bush league” is a *minor* or *amateur* league, where lower level players hang around. According to OED, it used to refer to teams that literally played “out in the bushes” or “in the sticks” (= in the countryside, in the middle of nowhere), as opposed to professional teams, which played in central city areas:

- Expansiunea rapidă a companiei (i.e. lanțul de restaurante « *La Plăcinte* ») s-a văzut în rezultatele financiare, care au crescut puternic, ducând compania aproape de *prima ligă*, mai exact, aproape de cei mai mari zece *jucători de pe piața* de restaurante, cafenele și baruri. (Rosca, 2016)

(The rapid expansion of the company (i.e. a restaurant chain) is visible in the financial statements, which grew significantly, bringing the company close to the *Major League*, more precisely, among the top ten *players* on the market of restaurants, cafés and bars.)

Apart from these English expressions, which are quite close or similar in both languages, there are also a few genuine *Romanian sports metaphors* (discussed and exemplified below), which *cannot* be translated into English, so they *cannot* be considered linguistic borrowings, but *internal* means of vocabulary enrichment. They may be taken as evidence of the fact that the sports metaphor functions just as well in Romanian - and probably in many other languages whose native speakers love competitive sports, for that matter.

In Romanian, the informal expression “*a o da în bară*” (En, literally: *to hit the posts*) means “to miss a target or make a mistake” (informally speaking, *to mess up, to screw up or blow it*). The metaphor is based on a sports expression (Ro: *a*

⁵ According to *Wikipedia*, the term *sidelines* is used mostly in *football*, *basketball* and *field lacrosse*, whereas in *rugby*, *sidelines* are called *touchlines*. In sports where the playing field is bounded by *walls* (such as *ice hockey* and *indoor football*), there are no *sidelines*, only *benches* (with a similar function).

trimite balonul în bară // En, literally: *to send the ball into the goalposts*⁶, which is used in all ball games (*balon* (Ro) = *ball*) that have *goalposts* (*bară* = *stâlp de poartă* (Ro) = *goalpost*), i.e. football, handball, polo or hockey. Here is just an example, taken from a business website:

- Autopsia unui eșec: Cum o dai în bară cu un startup în IT și pierzi 50,000 de dolari cu o idee epică. (Popica, 2017, headline on www.startupcafe.ro)

(The autopsy of a business failure: how to hit the posts with (= mess up / screw up) an IT startup and lose 50,000 dollars with an epic idea.)

Another interesting example comes from *volleyball*: “*a-i ridică mingea la fileu*” (En, literally: *to lift / raise the ball to the net*), which means “to make a move that helps another player” (metaphorically speaking, *to play into the hands of your opponent*). The metaphor is internally generated in Romanian (there is no close English equivalent) and it is used *figuratively* in many contexts, such as:

- Controalele de astăzi de la Marriott le ridică mingea la fileu celor care susțin impozitul specific. (Iancu, 2016) (Today’s checks at Marriott are *lifting the ball to the net* for (= *playing into the hands of*) those who support specific taxation.)

Two more relevant examples come from the source domain of ball games: the English words *offside* (adverb, adjective, noun used in *football*, *rugby* and (*field or ice*) *hockey*) and the compound noun *foul (play)* (= *unfair behavior or stroke*), as well as the derived verb *to foul* (= *to commit a foul against an opponent*)⁷. They were borrowed into Romanian, but they have developed their own *metaphorical (figurative)* meanings.

Thus, *offside* is used in *different collocations and contexts* in the two languages. In English, we say *be / play offside* or *in offside position* and the figurative meaning (i.e. to cross the line or go too far) is *not* common. However, in Romanian, the word usually collocates with the verb *a prinde* (= to catch) and it is often used metaphorically to mean “to catch someone *red-handed* or *in the act* (of doing something wrong), such as breaking rules or the law”:

- Regele bitumului din România, prins în offside de DNA. L-a salvat un împrumut bancar (EVZ, 2011, headline in *Evenimentul zilei*, 30 October 2011)

(The Romanian king of bitumen, *caught in offside position* by the Anti-Corruption Department. He was saved by a bank loan.)

The case of *foul (play)* is even more interesting, as it generated the Romanian noun *fault* (En *foul play*) and the derived verb *a faulta* (En *to foul*), which represent an example of *false etymology* (i.e. a confusion of meaning based on the phonetic similarity between the English words *foul* and *fault*). Figurative (metaphorical) expressions based on the verb *to foul* are very common in Romanian, but *not* in English:

- Răzvan Petrovici: Mediul de afaceri autohton a fost, dacă nu *faultat*, cel puțin neajutat sau nesprijinit (Drăghici, 2012)

(The Romanian *business environment* has been *fouled*, or at least not supported or helped in any way.)

- Cum încearcă super-marketurile să *faulteze* producătorii români (Cuvântul ortodox, 2017)

(How supermarkets are trying to *foul* Romanian producers.)

We see from the above examples that, even if Romanian has borrowed some sports-related English metaphors, these expressions have come to develop their own metaphorical and figurative meanings; in other words, they have projected their own *target* domains (business or other similar activities) in the borrowing language (Romanian), which proves that the sports metaphor functions cross-linguistically.

2.2. Racing sports (athletics / track and field, horse racing, motor racing)

In racing sports, common metaphors include: *the front runner / the favorite* (Ro: *favorit*), *hurdles* (= obstacles, impediments), *marathon* (noun / adj.) – e.g.: *maratonul prețurilor* (En *price marathon*).

⁶ <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/bar%C4%83>

⁷ The term *foul* (especially as a *noun*) is used mostly in *football (soccer)*, but also in *basketball*.

An expression that has been borrowed as such from *motor racing* is *(to be) in pole position* (i.e. to be in the best possible position / situation in a competition) – e.g. We are *in pole position* to win this contract.

If you are under pressure and you (barely manage to) finish something at the very last moment, you are *under the wire* or *down to the wire* (Ro: *pe ultima sută de metri, în ultimul moment*). It means that you are almost out of time to do the job. In *horse racing*, the *wire* was the line (string, cord, rope) that was traditionally stretched over the tracks to mark the finish(ing) line.⁸

A similar expression, borrowed from the same sport, is *(to be) in the home stretch* (= the final phase of an activity or project). In a race, the *homestretch* is the final part of the track, before the finishing line:

- Banca Transilvania, la un pas de cea mai mare afacere din istoria ei - negocierile sunt *pe ultima sută de metri*. (Hostiuc, 2017)

(Transilvania Bank, one step away from the largest deal in its history – negotiations are *under the wire / in the homestretch*.)

- OTP Bank este *pe ultima sută de metri* în preluarea Millennium Bank (article in *Adevărul*, 11 July 2014, www.adevarul.ro)

(OTP Bank is *down to the wire* to take over Millennium Bank.)

The examples above clearly show that the sports metaphors in Romanian are *not* loan translations (or even close equivalents) of the English ones, since the idioms in the two languages are only *semantically* similar, but structurally (formally) quite different. This proves that the two *unrelated* languages discussed here (English and Romanian) have conceptualized these domains (sports and business) in a similar way.

In *Romanian*, the source domain of *relay race* has engendered the idiom “*a preda / a prelua ștafeta*”, which (roughly) translates into English as “*to pass on / take up the torch*”. Even if the two metaphors are similar in meaning and form, the main nouns, i.e. the *baton* (in relay race) and the *torch* (= the Olympic torch) are *not* one and the same thing, which proves that the two idioms are generated independently, within the respective languages:

- *Predare de ștafetă* la un business de 5 mld. euro pe an. Cea mai mare companie din România are un nou CEO (Ziarul financiar, 2018)

(*Passing on the torch* in a 5 bn euro per year *business* – the largest *company* in Romania has a new CEO.)

- Ultimul interviu înainte de *a preda ștafeta*. Adrian Pascu lasă Danone România cu afaceri și profitabilitate în creștere... (Panaete, 2017)

(The last interview before *passing on the torch*. Adrian Pascu leaves Danone Romania with growing *business* and *profits* ...).

2.3. Boxing and wrestling

Lots of expressions come from violent sports, such as boxing and wrestling, which obviously connects the sports and war metaphors as used in the field of business. The profusion of this category of idioms may come to prove that business is more of a fight than a fun competition game.

From an abundance of English pugilistic metaphors available online⁹ and elsewhere, I have selected only a few relevant ones, which also have a *close equivalent* in Romanian: *a blow below the belt / a low blow* (Ro: *lovitură sub centură*), *decisive blow* (Ro: *lovitură decisivă*), *killer blow* (Ro: *lovitură de grație*), etc.

If you are in a difficult or desperate situation, you are *boxed into a corner* or *on the ropes* (Ro: *băgat în colț / prins în corzi*), *floored / down for the count* (Ro: *pus la pământ / la podea*), *down and out / knocked out* (Ro: *KO*) / *out of the game* (Ro: *scos din joc*)¹⁰.

⁸ According to AHDI, the phrase became colloquial in English after 1850, in England, Australia and America, where horse-racing was a very popular sport.

⁹ For a detailed list of *boxing* metaphors in English (with *examples* and clear explanations on both sports and non-sports *usage*), visit: <https://sites.google.com/site/sportingmetaphors/match-stats>.

¹⁰ If a boxer is *floored* or *down for the count*, it means that he is lying *down* on the *floor* and the referee is *counting* off the 10 seconds, during which time he can still get back up on his feet and resume the game. Thus, these metaphors refer to a difficult, but *not* desperate situation, where there is still a chance of recovery. However, when a boxer is *KO* (= *knocked-out*) or *down and out*, it means that his time is up and he is *out of the game*. Similarly, the metaphors describe a hopeless situation, a definite failure (and not just a temporary setback).

If you *let down your guard* (Ro: *a lăsa garda jos*), you are defenseless. If you *take off the gloves* or if *the gloves are off* (Ro: *fără mănuși / fără menajamente*)¹¹, it means that the fight gets tough and opponents *pull no punches*, i.e. they do not spare each other.

Players and companies may be *heavyweight* (Ro: *de categorie grea*) or *lightweight* (Ro: *de categorie ușoară*).

Here are some examples (taken from the Romanian business press), containing some of the expressions listed above (or a close equivalent thereof):

- *Lovitură sub centură* pentru ruși din partea VISA și MasterCard (...) Visa și MasterCard au oprit, fără preaviz, serviciile de plăți prin carduri pentru clienții băncilor rusești, în urma sancțiunilor anunțate de autoritățile de la Washington. (I.M.D., 2014)

(A *low blow / A blow below the belt* for the Russians, from VISA and MasterCard, which ceased card payment services for the clients of Russian banks, without notice, as a result of the penalties announced by authorities in Washington D.C.)

- Cum și-au folosit americanii de la HP poziția dominantă și *au scos din joc*¹² o firmă românească, pentru a favoriza un grup austriac, într-un contract de consumabile cu OMV Petrom. (Seceleanu, 2015)

(How the Americans from HP used their dominant position and *took out of the game* a Romanian company, in order to favor an Austrian group, in a contract for consumables with OMV Petrom.)

- Mașina electrică Tesla *bagă concurența în corzi*, printr-o decizie-șoc (Realitatea.net, 2014)

(Tesla electrical car *pushes competition into a corner / boxes competition on the ropes*, by a shock(ing) decision.)

- Sony, *e knock-out*: pierderi nete anuale de 6,4 miliarde de dolari. (Nedelcu, 2012)

(Sorry, *it's knockout*: net annual losses of 6.4 bn dollars.)

- Topul Național al Firmelor: Care sunt cele mai performante *companii gălățene de categorie grea* (Amălinei, 2015)

(A national ranking of business companies: the *heavyweight companies* in Galați...)

- Marian Dumitru, președintele Premier Palace - *un businessman de categorie grea* (Casino Magazine, 2013)

(Marian Dumitru, the president of Premier Palace – a *heavyweight businessman*.)

In English, if you *throw your hat in the ring*, it means you announce that you wish to take part in a competition. Why your *hat*? Apparently, in the late 19th century, anybody could challenge a boxer by simply throwing his hat in the ring¹³. Similarly, in both English and Romanian, if you want to challenge someone to a fight, you *throw them your gauntlet* (Ro: *a arunca mănușa*) and, if they *pick up the gauntlet* (Ro: *a ridica mănușa*), it means they accept the challenge. The two sports metaphors are obviously similar, but the *gauntlet* version has a different and older origin, namely the medieval tournaments (jousts). Until the early 20th century, the gesture literally meant that you were challenging someone to a duel, which was often a life or death fight, so the expression may also be viewed as a *war metaphor*.

A number of very common Romanian metaphors are built around the noun "*ring*" (= boxing rink or dance floor), referring to a competition *place* or *space*. A similar word is "*teren*" (= field), which is equally productive in English. Thus, in everyday language, the expression "*a elibera ringul*" (En, literally: *to clear the rink*) means "to leave a competition place, either because you are *not* a player / competitor or because you have been *taken out of the game* (see above – "*scos din joc*")"; this metaphorical expression has two close equivalents in English, but with different meanings: *to leave the field* (= to leave the competition / game) and *to leave the field clear for someone else* (= to make it possible for someone to win or be successful by leaving the game / by *not* competing with them). In this case, the Romanian metaphor (*a elibera ringul*) is clearly *not* a translation of the English metaphors (*to leave the field*), but it is generated internally, starting from the source domain of sports (*boxing* or *dancing*). Other related (*rink-based*) metaphors used in business are cited below:

- Procedura de tranzacție în *ringul produselor petroliere* (www.anre.ro/)

(The transaction procedure in the *rink / field* of oil products.)

¹¹ Also used in *hockey*.

¹² The expression "*(to be taken) out of the game*" may be used in other sports as well and it obviously refers to a player who has either lost a game / match because he has made some fatal *mistake* or he has been forced to leave by a referee's decision, probably as a result of breaking some major *rule* of the game.

¹³ <https://sites.google.com/site/sportingmetaphors/match-stats>

- După exiturile parafate în ultimii ani, au reintrat rapid în *ringul de business*, cu ambiția de a dezvolta din nou. (Cirișer, 2018)

(Following the last years' exits, they have rapidly re-entered the *business rink / field*, with an ambition to develop again.)

- [Sectorul IT românesc, ringul marilor jucători internaționali](#) (G.F., 2017)

(The Romanian IT sector, the *rink / field* of great international *players*.)

2.4. Other sports

Other less linguistically prolific sports and the metaphoric expressions they produced are: the noun *stalemate* (at *chess*) (= deadlock, tie, standoff¹⁴, standstill - Ro: *remiză, punct mort*) or the verbal expression (to be (*right*) on) *target* (in *archery*) (= to make progress and be quite likely to achieve the set aims / goals in due time - Ro: *drept la țintă*), where the noun *target* functions as the main metaphor:

- It looks like we are (*right*) on *target* with this project. (En)
- *target* market (Ro: piața-țintă)
- *targeted* strategy / approach (Ro: strategie / abordare țintită - pentru un anumit segment de piață, etc)

It can be argued of course that the Romanian examples above, as widespread as they may be, are just loan translations of their English equivalents. Although this may be true in such cases, it is still proof that this sports metaphor is viable and functional in both languages (or else these metaphors could not have "survived" in the *target* language).

Conclusions

The comparative (cross-linguistic) analysis of conceptual (conventional) metaphors in English and Romanian provides a useful tool for both *translation studies* and *language teaching* (applied linguistics).

Business discourse is rather abstract in nature and not always accessible to most people; it consequently lives through conventional (conceptual) metaphors. Sports metaphors are mostly *competition metaphors* and they are closely related to *war metaphors*, occurring frequently in both business and everyday language.

From a cross-linguistic perspective, the fact that some sports metaphors in Romanian (e.g. *a o da în bară, a-i ridica mingea la fileu, a preda ștafeta, a elibera ringul*, etc) do *not* have any equivalent in English supports the hypothesis that metaphoric mapping is an authentic and productive cognitive process, which occurs spontaneously in different (*unaffiliated*) languages. Another piece of evidence is provided by English metaphors originating from American and British national sports (baseball and cricket), which do *not* have equivalents in other languages (such as Romanian). Sports metaphors that are *semantically* similar in English and Romanian (e.g. En *under the wire / in the homestretch* // Ro *pe ultima sută de metri*) *cannot* be dismissed as mere instances of language contact or loan translations and they do *not* invalidate the cross-linguistic (cognitive) hypothesis.

This goes on to show that human mind conceptualizes reality into basically similar patterns across different languages and cultures.

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