

JOB AND MONEY METAPHORS IN BUSINESS JOURNALESE¹

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse metaphors related to the concepts of “money” and “job” found in a self-made minicorpus, and to identify the patterns according to which the two words were analysed and clustered around conceptual metaphors. The analysis is based on a selection of 9 articles, written in 2015, from the general audience broadsheet, *The Telegraph*. The instruments used were the automatic concordancing software ConcApp and various dictionaries and lexical datasets available online. Moreover, manual identification of metaphors was used too, and the metaphors were explained and analysed, leading in the end to a generalisation of findings. The results obtained revealed interesting aspects regarding money- and job-based conceptual metaphors and also thought-provoking conclusions concerning various aspects of contemporary economy.

Key words: Job and money metaphors; Proverbs; Idioms; Figurative business language.

1 Introduction. Paper Rationale

The aim of this paper is to illustrate the importance of metaphors and figurative language in general and how these are used in an everyday business context, particularly in journalese. We chose to focus on this language issue, due to the fact that, first of all, economy is a pervasive aspect of our everyday life, and, as the old adage says “money makes the world go round”, we acknowledge the importance of finance-related topics in the journalistic discourse. Second of all, because the metaphorical language present in the economic world is a topical point of interest, and various professionals can use the richness of figurative language in order to understand better the language used in this domain, to teach it to others or to translate it. Thus, we can assert that intercultural communication competence develops as well along with the figurative lexicon and therefore we get to apprehend foreign cultures more easily.

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Metaphors are, as Lakoff and Johnson present in their seminal book, *Metaphors we live by*, “a device of the poetic imagination [...], a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language” (1980: 4), or a simpler way to put it, metaphors are used in order to embellish our language. They also serve the purpose of making the discourse more understandable and sending the message in an easier way. Apart from literature, where metaphors are used at a higher rate, they can appear even in everyday language and even in media. The particular journalese this paper focuses on is the business one. Economic discourse has abounded in figurative language since the beginning of economic activities themselves. The communicative function of metaphor in particular is to be found in journal article titles, the financial press, headlines, marketing or advertising, etc. (Popescu 2012, 2016, 2017). We will notice how the business vocabulary intertwines with biology terms or even natural phenomena, all in order to make the readers better understand how the economy works.

2 Theoretical foundations and related literature

Metaphors are linguistic devices which we use regularly, almost daily, in order to express our ideas more accurately and with a higher impact and to make the others understand more easily what we want to transmit. We generally believe, in line with Kövecses’ statement, that only poets and writers used sophisticated and metaphorical language, because “literature is a part of culture” (2005: 1), whereas all of us speak in metaphors, whether we admit (or notice this) or not. But what are metaphors and why do we use them so frequently? According to Lakoff and Johnson, “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (1980: 6), in other words it is like a comparison in between two ideas or terms which we use to both embellish our language and to make others to understand what we want to express. However, the two authors mention a new kind of metaphor, slightly more complex, namely the conceptual metaphor, which they explain as being “grounded in *correlations* within our experience” (1980: 156), in other words crossed-correlations between two terms are used, which at first are different, but they move along to show a new picture. One example of a conceptual metaphor widely used in their book is “ARGUMENT IS WAR” (1980: 5). At a first look, they seem not to share any common ground, but then again, this metaphor contains a wide variety of expressions, like “Your claims are indefensible”, “He attacked every weak point in my argument. His criticisms were right on target” or “If you use that strategy, he’ll wipe you out. He shot down all of my arguments” (1980: 5). And here is how the two terms, argument and war, although extremely different, actually come together, due to the fact that when two persons argue, in some cases they use military terms in their arguments. Lakoff and Johnson further mention that

the heart of metaphor is inference. Conceptual metaphor allows inferences in sensory-motor domains (e.g., domains of space and objects) to be used to draw inferences about

other domains (e.g., domains of subjective judgment, with concepts like intimacy, emotions, justice, and so on). Because we reason in terms of metaphor, the metaphors we use determine a great deal about how we live our lives (1980: 245).

We have embraced their affirmation regarding these unusual correlations between words, as well as their theory that the meaning of words can juggle freely everywhere and can stop in unexpected places, giving birth to new, unprecedented expressions and phrases. At the end of the day, we do not simply use metaphors and speak in a metaphoric language, but rather we actually understand the world we live in with the help of metaphors (Kövecses 2005: 2).

Generally speaking, the two books, Lakoff and Johnson's and Kövecses' afford a new perspective upon conceptual metaphors and metaphors per se and give birth to new theories of metaphor variations. It is highly important that we know what metaphors are and how we should use them, because we speak in metaphors and we use them without even realising it, and somehow this can give insights into the workings of our human minds.

3 Research Methodology

The current analysis is based on one minicorpus, consisting of articles from general audience broadsheet *The Telegraph*, all written during 2015.

In order to help the readers, and particularly fellow specialists, to understand how metaphors occur in discourse and how to find them, the Pragglejaz Group – a group of ten professors, including Zoltan Kövecses – developed a four-step method, which they called “Metaphor Identification Procedure” (shortly MIP) to be used in order to identify metaphors in a text, namely:

- a. First step is to read the entire text and to understand what it is about;
- b. The second step deals with the identification of the lexical units present in the text;
- c. After the lexical units are identified, one must establish their meaning in the context or if they have a more basic meaning in other contexts than in the given text;
- d. If the lexical unit does in the end have a different meaning, then it is a metaphor (2007: 3).

The current research was carried out based on a combination of the above mentioned methods in order to identify metaphorical linguistic expressions, starting from the headwords. The methods used were: quantitative analysis, based on statistical data starting from key words and collocations frequently identified in minicorpus; and qualitative analysis, in which the metaphors found were analysed from the perspective of their universality.

The size of the minicorpus is of approximately 6,000 words and the instruments used were the application Concapp for identifying lexical associations, the WordNet database for finding “money” and “job” related figures of speech, the

Thesaurus dictionary for synonyms, and other online dictionaries such as Investopedia and EconomicsHelp.

4 Results and Interpretation

The results confirmed that the expressions found and grouped in particular ways with other universal terms, lead to the creation of new meanings of the words “money” and “job”. Job and money belong to lexical fields which are not too different, for one is dependent on the other, namely there cannot be money without a job, i.e. work done in order to earn money.

Especially money represents the focus of research in various domains, economy being the most obvious one, followed by philosophy and to a certain extent by theology (we all know the old adage *Money is the Devil's eye*). It represents a matter of concern, which every person has in mind, and this is why the money references found in the minicorpus are more recurrent than the job ones. The best known phrase about money, mentioned earlier in this paper and which sums up all the money-related phrases, is “money makes the world go round”. This phrase basically means that without this medium of exchange, everything in this world would stop. And indeed, up to a certain extent the remark is true, in the sense that we could not afford a shelter on our head, or food, clothes, vehicles, day to day objects, etc. Another very well-known maxim related to money is “money can't buy happiness”, which is in itself another relative concept. It depends on how every person sees happiness and what people understand of it; for some people happiness means a lot of money and the possibility to do whatever they want with it, from visiting exotic places, to buying luxurious houses, fancy cars, clothes, jewellery and so on, whereas for others, happiness simply comes from having one's family and friends around.

4.1 MONEY idioms

As mentioned above, the idioms related to money were found rather frequently in the minicorpus, and they generally illustrate the fluctuations of the economy. An interesting aspect emerging from this research is the fact that, in spite of finding numerous expressions and phrases with the word “money”, its meanings are not very many. The Visual Thesaurus, as well as other dictionaries provide a relatively limited semantic area, i.e. three main meanings: a medium of exchange (from the monetary system), currency and wealth (financial means).

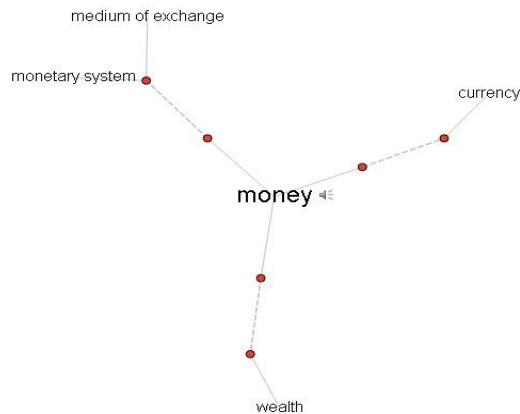


Figure 1. The semantic network of money (Visual Thesaurus)

The findings directly related to “money” identified in the corpus are as follows:

1. financial benefactor seemingly content to throw good money after bad².
(TG 2015)

This idiom means *to waste money by spending more money on something you have already spent money on that is no good* (Cambridge Dictionary). Based on this explanation, we could say that money is conceptualised as a solid moving object since it can be thrown away (MONEY IS A MOVING ENTITY). Moreover, it also has a moral connotation due to the fact that money can be both good and bad, depending on how one spends it. We may refer to bad money when spent in a bad way and for no reasonable motives, and good money is when one invests it in charity, for example.

2. an industry, particularly one that generates as much money as Formula One.
The sport is massive. (TG 2015, June 21)

The size itself of the pension funds industry is given by the amount of money it can produce. The comparison with the Formula One clearly shows that there are considerable sums of money produced by the specific industry, and moreover, it is ‘a sport’.

3. Watching the money as Gulf-Keystone Petroleum faces perfect storm (TG 2015, July 27)

The idiom ‘a perfect storm’ means *an extremely bad situation in which many bad things happen at the same time* (Cambridge Dictionary), and lately is widely used in the business language, in general referring to adverse factors concurring to a

² “to throw good money after bad” might have an equivalent phrase in Romanian, namely “banii sunt ochiul dracului”, „money is the devil’s eye”.

financial / economic crisis. In this article title, the significance is that the company takes serious care of how they invest their money and how it is preserved while the company faces a crisis, illustrated by the “perfect storm”.

4. still owed around \$200m in total. Recovering this **money** is a priority
5. 10 teams were paid a record £484m in prize-**money** last year
6. the Commissioner to be given authority to borrow **money** on the markets
7. We are being super-careful about what we're spending our **money** on. "I want to send a message to shareholders"
8. that is that we're watching the **money**
9. that hasn't led to a swift payment of all the **money** still owed to operators.

The above examples only show the regular use of the word “money” with no figure of speech included, and also generally picture the care that managers show regarding their company's finances.

10. the controls of this **money**-spinning machine have been in the hands of the same individual for nearly four decades (TG 2015, June 21)

According to Cambridge dictionary, a money-spinner is *a product, business, or idea that makes a lot of money, or a project that generates a continuous flow of money* (according to thefreedictionary). This metaphor conceptualises the idea of A COMPANY IS A MACHINE which can be controlled in order to make a tangible product, i.e. in our case, money.

Considering the fact that all the articles in the minicorpus have economic themes, it is natural to observe a high frequency of lexical units referring to financial growth, since all investors wants a higher yield of the money they have invested in the first place. Thus, in the following, the focus will be upon the phrases which relate to budget increase. Such expressions are: *budget surplus; economic growth; growing pensions; budget surplus; total assets grew; sales grew*. Examples extracted from the first articles simply refer to an increase in the budget that the company has, respectively, the increase in the amount of money. On the other side, taking into consideration that companies don't face only ups, but downs as well, we also found idioms and figurative expressions related to money which suggest the decrease of money's value or decrease of sales. Hence we identified: *fiscal crunch, or simply fiscal crush; economic activity was running above its sustainable level; to reduce Britain's debt; debt ratio fall more slowly or rapidly; falling food prices; the consumer price rise rate is still below; declining sales; inflation was unchanged; financial pain; the inevitable crisis; cash shortfall, meaning cash deficit; the company reported a \$2.98m loss*. It is highly natural for the companies to lose money due to the constant change of money's value.

However, it was interesting to see how managers, tycoons and CEO's refer to financial loses in figurative language, the best example being “financial pain”. A COMPANY IS A LIVING ORGANISM, in conceptual terms, and not surprisingly, since this is how managers and owners personify their own companies. Moreover, in

another article which makes reference to a decrease in oil's value, there is a manager who develops the subject and specifies how extremely careful he is with the company's money. So as soon as he learns that the *value of oil has plummeted*, meaning that it drastically decreased and the *oil price falls* dramatically low, he described the situation in a very plastic way, namely he named it a "*perfect storm*", or a perfect disaster. Obviously his company lost a significant amount of money and *recovering the money* which they lost along with the oil price fall is the most important task. He continued that in the next period there will be a *steady flow of payments*, meaning that if they do not get paid, they are literally in trouble, this only making the company to be *on a knife-edge in terms of commercial position*. We can almost say that the oil price fall was a tragedy in the economic domain, due to the fact that the same manager comments that *the oil industry is the golden goose there and they know that it has to be protected*, namely there are some serious money involved and it is always a profitable business, so is a pity to lose them, therefore, their task now is to literally *watch the money* and to invest carefully. Another fear they have is that the *investment in the company may be diluted* in the next period until oil price comes back to normal. This only demonstrates how important the power and value of money are in such situations. On the other hand, it is impressive how plastic one can become when referring to money.

However, the economic domain is not always about losing money, nor earning all the time. There are cases when the budget and the economy in general is at a stable level, so as in the examples found in the articles, such as: companies *balancing their budget* in order not to spend more money and fall again into the "dark side" where there are not enough money; another counsel states that *the country's financial system has always been well-capitalised, well-managed* for the same reason of not reaching the situation when the money are not enough anymore; also companies appeal to strict investments that eventually lead to higher returns; countries switch to *free-market economy* which refers to, according to Investopedia, "an economy where the government imposes few or no restrictions and regulations on buyers and sellers"; and other countries appeal to *state-regulated economy*, because every governor wants what's best for the country lest they should lose money. Also managers talk about *regular pattern of payments* to be sure that they have money constantly; and eventually, the European states go for *fiscal union* in order to prevent a debt crisis, which need no further ado.

With reference to what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) stated about conceptual metaphors, that they are expressions explained via another terms, after analysing the articles from the minicorpus, we found a few metaphors of this kind, such as:

- a) *financial pain* – meaning that the loss of a significant sum of money hurts like a disease and feels like real pain (**A COMPANY IS A LIVING ORGANISM**);
- b) *to be on a knife-edge* in terms of commercial position – in other words, the company does not sell so well anymore, thus being very close to the previously mentioned "dark side" when they already start to lose money (**ECONOMY IS WAR**);

- c) *money-spinning machine* – that is a way of expressing substantial earnings for someone (A COMPANY IS A MACHINE)
- d) *the oil industry is the golden goose³* – in very explicit terms it means that the oil industry is the most profitable of all industries, making unimaginable profit, if used wisely, considering the moral of the Aesop's fable (GREED IS LOSS).

4.2 JOB idioms

The next word analysed in this self-made minicorpus is “job”. A fist conclusion that we drew regarding the articles is that they are more focused on economy and the constant changing value of money, and not so much on the subjects related to job, which is why there are few references identified. Worth mentioning though is the fact that this word is analysed as being a workplace, an application program, and not a chore, task or duty.

We found out an interesting aspect related to the semantic field of job, which is much larger than that of money, and however, there are fewer instances of this word. The Visual Thesaurus offered unexpectedly many synonyms:

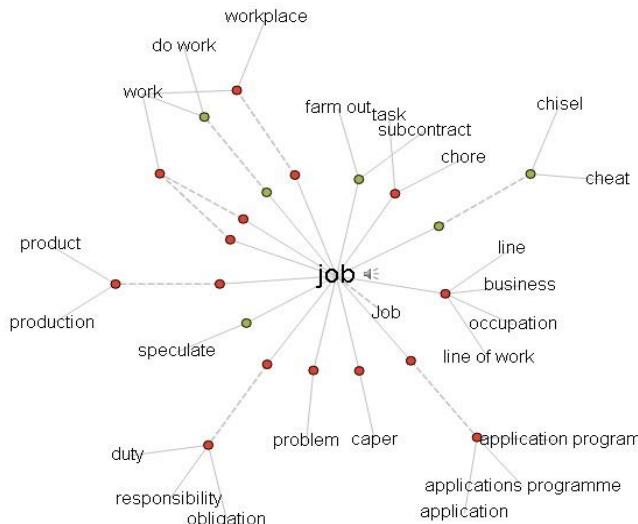


Figure 2. The semantic network for job (Visual Thesaurus)

However, as mentioned above, the only reference found with the Concapp application was:

1. it was tough but that was how you learnt to do the **job**. (TG 2015, June 21)

³ The golden goose is translated into Romanian as “cloșca cu puii de aur”, but has a different meaning, representing a collection of golden pieces, now part of the Romanian national treasury, which is considered to be priceless, but also cursed.

In this particular example, although it is the only one found to contain the word “job”, it does not necessarily refer to job as a workplace, but rather to the performance of a piece of work, or a chore. However, further research has been made and the result came in our favour by finding another references, but this time in the shape of the word “labour”.

2. they also allocate investment funds and have a say in **labour market** policy.
(TG 2015, August 31)

In this example it can be seen that “labour” does not come alone, but is accompanied by “market”, thus resulting the phrase *labour market* which, according to The Economic Times, is “the place where workers and employees interact with each other, and here employers compete to hire the best workers”.

3. The vast majority of cocoa produced is done in areas with insufficient rainfall and that we consider to be horrific **labour practices**. (TG 2015, June 30)

Here, “labour” refers generally to work, but rather difficult, hard work which would not happen in normal conditions.

Furthermore, we turned our attention towards another synonym of the word “job” only to find examples with the word “career”, which belongs to the same semantic area of “job”. Using the Concapp application, we found the following:

4. executive of Gulf Keystone Petroleum started his **career** living in a tent for three years exploring (TG 2015, July 27)

Similar to “life history”, *career* refers to the general progression of one’s working or professional life (Visual Thesaurus).

5. this experience has nevertheless shaped his approach to a **career** which eventually saw him shift from searching for gold to searching for oil (TG 2015, July 27)

Here, the meaning that “career” has is vocation, calling, namely the particular occupation for which one was trained (Visual Thesaurus).

5 Conclusions

Considering the fact that there were numerous examples with the keywords, especially with “money”, and their synonyms, it is nearly impossible to reach a single conclusion and to form a general statement, which is why in the following we shall present again the phrases which helped us get a deeper insight into the usage of these words in business journalese.

Starting with the phrase “to throw good money after bad”, which, as reported by The Cambridge Dictionary, means “to waste additional money after wasting money once”, this led us not to one conclusion, but two. Hence, if one can throw money, we can only deduce that money is a moving object/entity. Moreover, we can only throw solid objects, thus money is a solid object which can be thrown. Another relevant phrase in this sense is “cash shortfall” which means that if the money’s value decrease, money falls as well, so again it demonstrates that money is solid and moving. However, in other article from the minicorpus there is the expression “steady flow of payments” which shows that money can also be liquid, so the figurative form of money is flexible since it can be both solid and liquid.

Reading further, we encounter the phrase “money-spinning machine” that can be easily related to “money-maker”, namely a very profitable business, in this context, proves that money is moving again and is also an instrument of power after all, and this power that money gives leads to disputes even between countries, although in some cases it can even regulate the relations between them.

Another example found in the articles is “money to spare” taken from the context in which Britain always has money to spare, suggesting that if a country has extra money, besides their budget, it means that they keep control of that money. We would add that the meaning of “money to spare” is somehow associated with that of “watching the money”. This is because if one watches the money it means that one takes care how the money is invested. Thus, the two examples lead to the result that CONTROL OF MONEY IS WELFARE, so one can control welfare by just controlling the money. Moreover, this conclusion lead to another one, that taking care of money, one can automatically take care of the welfare of their entire company, because if money is not well-managed, the budget might risk to fall into the dark side, meaning to lose money, and losing control of money only leads to trouble.

Some other conclusions that we can draw are from more than just one statement, namely now we relate to more phrases which take us to one interesting conclusion. We already agreed that if the value of money or oil decreases, this is perceived as a disease or a natural calamity for the economy, this idea being perfectly represented by the expressions “financial pain”, “the decreasing of oil’s value is a perfect storm” and “financial crisis is a natural disaster”. This happens only when economy is not favourable for investments, in other metaphorical words we can say that economy has caught a cold accompanied by severe pain. But what happens when the economy gets back on the right track, are there budget increases and do money and oil have normal prices again? Clearly, the economy undergoes a recovery from disease. The conclusion that we can reach is that the economy is a living entity, since it can feel pain and “catch a cold”.

Now it is rather difficult to come to a single conclusion of the results presented above, but mainly, a general statement about money might be that ECONOMY is both a LIVING ORGANISM and a MOVING ENTITY because it moves and is permanently changing either by increasing or by decreasing.

Moreover, besides the conclusions from the keywords, we were able to come to an outcome regarding the articles as well. Earlier in this paper it was mentioned

that all the articles from our self-made minicorpus were written during 2015, which inevitably revealed a social economic tendency. Generally, the articles inform that the economic world was severely shaken in that year by the unexpectedly falling values of both money and oil, which imbalanced the budget and led to an unavoidable crisis. This only forced people to borrow more since the eve of the financial crisis.

We recommend further research because economy, even though it might not seem as an attractive field, is an up to date subject which interests each and every one of us. We also encourage further study in the field of conceptual metaphors in business because it is far more interesting than it appears at the beginning and one can dramatically enlarge their vocabulary with economic terms and interesting business metaphors.

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