

Business English Teaching in the Next Information Revolution

BUSINESS IS THE NAME OF THE GAME- BUSINESS IS A GAME

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Abstract–This article presents a part of the Action Research for students of Faculty of Economics Rijeka on cognitive and cultural models applied to Business English teaching. The focus is placed on the conceptual metaphor BUSINESS IS A SPORTING EVENT in two business environments – Anglo-Saxon and Croatian. By analyzing the results of our cross-cultural analysis of the most common sports metaphors in business discourse of the so-called “The Next Information Revolution”, the paper concludes with recommendations for further development of this teaching methodology.

Index Terms–action research, cognitive linguistics, the next information revolution, conceptual metaphor

I. INTRODUCTION

In this paper we describe the process, main objectives and results of our action research based on the major findings of cognitive linguistics and modern economics. The former is based on a conceptual metaphor that forms the consciousness of individuals, social groups and nations [1], and the latter is based on the Next Information Revolution [2] that is a revolution in CONCEPTS.

We have chosen action research primarily because it is “practice to theory rather than theory to practice” [3]. In order to conduct our research, out of 100 students in the class, 20% (active sportsmen) were involved in action research and later on as presenters of the collected data. The other 80% were active listeners participating in evaluation and debate.

The starting point of our research is our main hypothesis: If political and economic ideologies are based on metaphors, and information/knowledge, English and sports have become EURO of the Next Society, then EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and

ESP (English for Specific Purposes) teaching and learning should be based on concepts, metaphors and grammar treated as a “symbolic structure” of the language [4].

The objectives of this paper are: (1) to review the concept of action research i.e. learning-by-doing, (2) to review the concept of conceptual metaphor BUSINESS IS A SPORTING EVENT and (3) to propose a specific application of the most common sports metaphors in the teaching of international business concepts.

The paper concludes with recommendations for further development of this teaching methodology.

II. WHY ACTION RESEARCH ON CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS FOR THE NEXT SOCIETY?

The first question that we have raised is: Do we have to wait for tomorrow, or have we already been faced with the fact that most professionals of today - from different walks of life - see their job as a life?

The management guru Peter Drucker in his 20-page survey *The Next Society: a survey of the near future* describes the expected business environment of the relatively near future: “It will not be dominated or even shaped by information technology. IT will of course be important, but it will be only one of several important new technologies. The central feature of the new society, as of its predecessors, will be new institutions and new theories, ideologies and problems”[5]. Such business environment will result in expansion of the knowledge-based economy and the rise in status of “knowledge technologists”. As in [5], it is stated that while yesterday’s workers saw their job first of all as a living, “most knowledge workers see their job as a life”. Reference [1] supports the idea by stating that the Next Information Revolution is not a revolution in computers and technology but a revolution in concepts.

This revolution in concepts, however, started much earlier, to be more precise, as early as the 1980s, with

the major findings of Cognitive Linguists, Lakoff and Johnson, when they first pointed out the conceptual potential of metaphors [6]. Metaphors are no longer regarded as ornamental figures of speech (as in traditional stylistics) but are understood as important conceptual tools that are not restricted to lexical categories, but as those that contribute to our understanding of complex scientific, political and social issues.

Having these aspects in mind, and believing in learning-by-doing, we have singled out in this paper part of our action research focused on conceptual metaphor BUSINESS IS A SPORTING EVENT.

Reference [3] gives a big picture of what action research is. Here we shall focus on the essential feature of action research and that is the “reflexivity which results from cycling backwards and forwards from data collection to analysis to further data collection and so on as the need arises. It is the integral part of the whole process and it is fluid and dynamic” (Anne Burns, 2003:154).

III. BUSINESS IS A SPORTING EVENT – SPORTS METAPHORS IN BUSINESS

The second question that we have raised is: Is it enough to pile sports terminology in business context, or is it the conceptualization that matters and contributes to understanding?

When nowadays we speak of Anglo-Saxon business environment, we automatically think of North American business rather than British, and so are with sports metaphors in business context (mostly taken from baseball, basketball and American football).

A. *CRICKET*: Although still very popular in Britain, there are only few metaphors taken from cricket. British people conceptualize cricket as fair play, team spirit, and acceptance of victory and defeat with equal grace. Therefore, in the metaphor *Is it cricket?* what is mapped from a source domain CRICKET to target domain BUSINESS is: Is it fair?, but other attributes of “cricket” (team spirit, acceptance of victory and defeat with equal grace) are also implied in their cognitive model. Partly because cricket is widely-accepted to be understood by nobody but British, it is very often used as an example of different conceptual systems across cultures, i.e. what is considered as obvious and self-implied in one culture, can cause ambiguity and conceptual gap in other culture because of lacking the same pre-conceptual experience.

- *It's not cricket!* - It's not fair
- *He is on a sticky wicket* - He is in a difficult situation.
- *Off one's own bat* – Without help from anyone else

B. AMERICAN FOOTBALL BASEBALL.. HORSE RACES:

Metaphors from different source domains are often used in the same business context, primarily those from American football, baseball and horse races.

- *We are in the 9th inning (baseball) and cannot afford to fumble (football) this thing now.*
- *He is still a rookie (all sports) and he'll have trouble getting out of the starting gate (horse racing) on this project.*
- *We are down to the wire (horse racing), the competition is heating up, and we cannot afford to be struck out (baseball).*
- *He is a veteran and can quarterback this project (baseball, football).*

For better understanding, we have classified metaphors as follows: Metaphors of Players; Starting a Game, Scoring and Finishing a Game [7].

(i) Metaphors of players :

Rookie – (all sports): beginner > in business - inexperienced person

Veteran – (all sports): experienced player > in business - experienced person

Quarterback –(American. Football): “brain of the game” > in business the quality of the offensive team player that lines up directly behind the centre is mapped to the target domain of a proactive business leader who has vision, action and discipline and estimates the right moment for acting.

Homerun hitter - (Baseball) : a player who can bring players in and get a point > in business, qualities of a homerun hitter (initiating the game, bringing players together..) are mapped to a successful business person/ manager...

Pinch-hitter – (Baseball): a substitute player who usually replaces the hitter when runs are badly needed.> in business, the attributes of a punch hitter are mapped to a person who does something for someone else because they are suddenly not able to do it themselves.

(ii) Starting a Game:

Batter up – Baseball

Tee off – Golf

Getting out of the starting gate – Horse races

As it is very important whether having a good or bad start in business, Americans have elaborated metaphors from different sports as source domains to signal the

beginning of the game, i.e. the beginning of a project, business, etc. In the sharp contrast to Americans, Croats, who are great football (soccer), basketball and handball fans in addition to volleyball, swimming, water polo, etc., lack sports metaphors even from their favourite sports as source domains, and therefore, all the above metaphors are translated according to the context as “dobar ili loš početak posla”.

(iii) Scoring and Winning:

Homerun – (Baseball): a long hit, which allows the player who hits the ball to run around the bases and get a point > in business a strategic plan of having enough time for achieving the set objective.

Hole-in-one –(Golf): scoring at first attempt

Touchdown – (American Football): scoring a goal

Slam dunk –(Basketball): To leap with a great vigour above the basket and stuff the ball through the hoop.

Grand Slam –(Baseball) a hit which gets four points because it is a homerun and there are players on all the bases. In other sports: the winning of all of a set of important sports competitions in the same year / or the set of most important competitions in a particular sport: *Branka Vlasic has won three Grand Slam titles.*

Again, all the above metaphors are translated into Croatian as “zgoditak”, “pun pogodak”, “dobiti sve poene”, “osvojiti sve nagrade” “imati sve adute u svojim rukama”. However, it is more than obvious that Croats, except in rare occasions, do not conceptualize business as a game.

(iv) Finishing a Game:

Two-minute warning - American football: players are warned that two minutes are left before blowing the whistle

Home/last stretch – Horse races: last race

Down to the wire- Horse race: last seconds

9th inning - Baseball : the last part of the game and the last chance to pitch the game.

All sports fans are aware of excitement and feverish support of their favourite team players in the last minutes of a match. However, different to American cultural model, where attributes of the last minute game are mapped to the target domain BUSINESS, in Croatian, metaphorical mapping from sports as a source domain to BUSINESS as a target domain is missing. Therefore, the above metaphors are translated into Croatian as “krajnje je vrijeme da završimo posao”, “pet minuta je do dvanaest”, “vrijeme nam ističe”. ..

The answer to the second question may be found in Lakoff's words: “The difference between translation and understanding is this: translation requires a

mapping from one language to another language. Understanding is something that is internal to a person. It has to do with his ability to conceptualize and to match those concepts to his experiences, on the one hand, and to the expressions of the new language on the other. Translation can occur without understanding, and understanding can occur without the possibility of translation.”[8].

IV. BUSINESS IS THE NAME OF THE GAME – A REVOLUTION IN CONCEPTS

The third question is: If conceptual metaphor BUSINESS IS A GAME is deeply rooted into the American cultural model, why Croats who boast of their sports champions, do not conceptualize business in the same way?

First of all, Croats used to live in socialism where one of the paradigms was: “Ne mogu me tako malo platiti, koliko malo mogu raditi”. Whether we translate it as “No matter how little they pay me, I can always work less” or “However hard or little I work, I just get the same payment”, the message is translated, but it does not have equivalent pre-conceptual experience in American business environment with prevailing conceptual metaphors: BUSINESS IS THE NAME OF THE GAME and TIME IS MONEY.

Does it mean that Croats or people from other ex-communist countries are lazy? The answer would be that living in a totalitarian system, made most workers create conceptual system of collective responsibility seeing their job as a living without any openings, not as a life.

The last question is: What would happen if Croats changed their concept of business into a sporting event?

As Reference [8] points out: “there is a distinction between conceptual systems and conceptualizing capacities. Since experience does not determine conceptual systems, but only motivates them, the same experiences may provide equally good motivation for two somewhat different conceptual systems.”

We have already been faced with radical changes in transition period, where the pre-conceptual experience of work has been changing, which are reflected in language or better to say, the change in language usage and metaphors reflects the shift in paradigm.

V. CONCLUSION REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When we set the subject of BUSINESS IS A SPORTING EVENT, most students were at a loss although being active sportsmen. At first, they did not see any correlation. However, before the investigation is finished, they have already developed some predictions, noticed linkage between sport and business, tried different strategies to test data, draw out explanations and interpret the meanings of “revolution in concepts”, “conceptual systems” and “conceptualizing capacity”. Thus, action research on the topic of conceptual metaphors and revolution in concepts applied to Business English teaching, enabled students to generate hypotheses, by noting sports metaphors and finding explanations for them.

After presenting their data and a long debate that followed, students have concluded that by changing our (Croatian) concept of business into a sporting event, Croats would definitely become more focused on SCORING AND WINNING. One of the arguments they have given is as follows: Most young Croats are both speakers of Croatian and English which is their comparative advantage to American speakers. We share the same basic experiences and enthusiasm about sports, and hence, some differences are not a hurdle. Therefore, becoming aware of some advantages of what sport and business have in common can help us construct and understand a different conceptual system.

Their conclusion can be paraphrased: If experience does not determine conceptual systems, but only motivates them, conceptualizing capacity can help us understand not only a completely different conceptual system but modify and improve ours as well.

As for action research, it has given us an insight into our students’ capacities, behaviours, beliefs, motivation. It has revealed their communication and presentation skills, their team spirit, and this topical issue can open up new questions that would lead to new directions of research and acquiring further language competence. In Reference [8] words: “When an experienced field linguist goes about learning another language, this is where he begins: with concepts for well-structured experiences that his years in the field have led him to believe are universal. For concepts like these, translation is often possible and understanding is relatively easy, if not immediate.”

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