

## SOME ISSUES OF BUSINESS TERMINOLOGY: NOMINAL GROUPS AND ORIENTATIONAL METAPHORS

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Even though, at first sight, many language professionals could be tempted to say that specialized translation is simpler than literary translation, an acceptable transfer of meaning remains a complex phenomenon. For such jobs, it is generally recommended to resort to a translator holding both linguistic and field-specific skills. The hereby paper presents some issues regarding business terminology in English, Spanish and Romanian, focusing on nominal groups and orientational metaphors.

**Keywords:** *business terminology, nominal groups, orientational metaphors.*

### UNELE PROBLEME ALE TERMINOLOGIEI DE AFACERI: GRUPURI NOMINALE ȘI METAFORE DE ORIENTARE

Chiar dac , la prima vedere, mulți lingviști pot fi tentați s  spun  c  traducerea specializat  este mai simpl  dec t cea literar , problema unui transfer acceptabil al semnificației r m ne una complex .  n astfel de situații se recomand  implicarea unui traduc tor care s  fie specializat pe domeniul  n cauz . Lucrarea de faț  prezint  o serie de aspecte legate de terminologia economic   n limbile englez , spaniol  și rom n , fiind axate pe grupurile nominale și pe metaforele orientaționale.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *terminologie economic , grupuri nominale, metafor  orientațional .*

### Introduction

Despite a general tendency to consider translation as something that almost anybody could do with a fair knowledge of the source and target languages and with the help of an adequate dictionary, an acceptable transfer of meaning is a much more complex phenomenon than what is commonly believed. Such complexity becomes even more obvious when the text deals with specialised subjects such as business, law, medicine, technology, or the like. In this particular case, it is highly recommended to resort to a translator holding both linguistic and field-specific skills (for instance, an economist for business texts, a lawyer linguist for legal texts, etc.).

A good translator must say all and nothing but what it is found in the original text, and he/she must do so in the most correct, natural, and elegant way. As a consequence, the ability to understand and interpret specific information entails some knowledge, as deep as possible, about the syntactic and morphological structure of the foreign text, apart from establishing the lexical relationships among the different words, relations which will differ depending on the specific situations in which specialised texts are embedded. That is to say, the main task of the translator is to eliminate all those textual elements from the original text which do not belong to the cultural background of the potential reader and produce an easy-to-understand and politically correct document.

However, although it is necessary to recognise these guidelines, it is also evident that any theoretical principle needs to be put into practice in order to prove effective. At the first sight, many language professionals could be tempted to say that specialised translation is simpler than literary translation, for instance, because the figurative and implicit meaning is left out. Legal, business, medical or technical jargon only has a literal meaning, which is easier to transfer to a foreign language. In specialised or internationalised fields, calques (a phrase borrowed from another language and literally translated, word-for-word) are a very common translation device. However, this is not always the case and translation problems arise especially in the case of structures such as nominal groups and orientational metaphors.

### Nominal groups

We shall deal with how a couple of the English nominal groups that refer to financial management theories (in the field of capital structure) have been translated and transposed into Romanian. They do not figure as such (as a whole nominal group) in the English to the Romanian financial or business dictionaries, and they are not to be found in the general press articles, so the source of the Romanian versions have been academic journals devoted to finance.

The phrase *trade-off theory* arose in the English language in order to explain how a decision maker running a company evaluates the various costs and benefits of funding alternatives and, finally, reaches a balance between marginal costs and benefits. The meaning of *trade-off* in English is that of balance, compromise and

compensation. However, this theory is known in Romanian by the name of *teoria arbitrajului* or *teoria arbitrajului static*. The first term is due to the French influence. It was not borrowed into Romanian from English, but from French, which, in turn, borrowed it from English (*théorie de l'arbitrage*). In this context, *arbitraj* refers to the idea of balancing and compensating two opposed elements, in order to obtain an optimal benefit (in the case of capital structure, equity and loans must be balanced). This is consistent with the meaning of the noun *arbitraj*, as given by the Dictionary of the Romanian Academy, i.e. the idea of a conflict or a controversy being solved by a generally impartial person (mostly applied in sports and legal practice). The second Romanian nominal group is *teoria arbitrajului static*. The same adjective appears in the Spanish version of the name of this financial management theory (*teoría del equilibrio estático*). Why is the adjective *static* added? The Romanian term first appeared in the book *Diagnostic economico-financiar* (Bucharest, 1994), a collective volume of papers. The author, the finance professor Dumitru Mărgulescu, considered that trade-off activities are by excellence static, they only imply a certain moment in time, a certain situation, a momentary effect and individual conclusions. The evolution of the Romanian financial literature has proved that other academics have agreed to this proposal and the term has begun to be widely used. In the more recent times, authors have started to take stand against this notion and have supported the removal of the adjective. Their argument is that trade-off theories are not by excellence static, but they can also be dynamic, factors may change in time and, therefore, decisions should also change. From our point of view, this last argument is correct, trade-off theory includes several dynamic models and its Romanian equivalent should not be restrictive, but comprehensive and suggestive.

Another nominal phrase denoting a financial management theory is *pecking order theory*, which describes the classification, the order a company should comply with when establishing its funding sources. This nominal group was taken over in economics from the field of animal behaviour. *Pecking order* or just *peck order* is the colloquial term for a hierarchical system of social organization in animals. The original usage of *peck order* referred to expression of dominance of birds. Dominance in chicken is expressed in various behaviours including pecking. Used in the financial context, *pecking order* implies just the same idea, that of dominance of a funding source on another and its graphical representation usually takes the shape of a pyramid, whose base consists of the preferred financing resource and the other resources are then used in descending order of preference. The term coined in Romanian for this specific theory is *teoria ierarhizării surselor de finanțare*. In this case, we no longer deal with a major influence of the French language (the French term is *théorie du financement hiérarchique*), but with the Romanian version trying to explain in detail what the theory is about. Whereas the English term is quite opaque for a person not familiar to the background of the bird dominance theory or for an ignorant in the field of finance, the Romanian term is more transparent and explicit.

A third technique of financial management refers to the *capital asset pricing model* (CAPM), used to determine a theoretically appropriate required rate of return of an asset. The Romanian literature generally takes the abbreviation over as such, as the theory is widely known and used and it could not raise problems of understanding. However, the major academic texts and schoolbooks refer to it as *teoria evaluării activelor financiare*. From our point of view, we are confronted to a quite problematic equivalence here. A capital asset is, according to the Longman Dictionary, all tangible property which cannot easily be converted into cash and which is usually held for a long period, including real estate, equipment. This would correspond to the Romanian term *active imobilizate*. Of course, securities and other types of financial assets (*imobilizări financiare*) are included in the category of long-term assets, but they are not the only ones. Moreover, financial assets are the long-term assets which are most easily convertible to cash, and this would represent quite a contradiction with the definition of the English term. Hence, the Romanian equivalent of the name of this theory restricts its application to financial assets, whereas the English language original is more complex and includes all types of long-term assets. One might argue that this is not very much of a problem, because the CAPM abbreviation is so renowned among economic scholars that it has long become tradition and few people would even try to think of its origin. However, our opinion is that a full-range compliant translation should be ensured and established and such a translation would be *teoria evaluării activelor imobilizate*.

### **Oriental metaphors**

Conceptual metaphors are so rooted in everyday language that most of us do not think of them as such. If we ask a computer scientist whether the word "mouse" is a metaphor, it is most probable that he/she will laugh at you, but, yet, a semanticist knows that it is indeed a metaphor, because the original term, used for naming a small rodent, was borrowed for designating the peripheral computer device. Within the category of concep-

tual metaphors, orientational metaphors, as shown by their name, entail a spatial orientation of the suggested terms: up and down (increase and decrease), forward and backward (progress and regression, future and past), central and peripheral (important and less important), deep and superficial (known and unknown). In every chart, the origin is always at the bottom and the other positive numbers follow upwards on the ordinate. However, one does not have to resort to mathematical representations in order to explain this type of metaphors. A child has no idea of Cartesian coordinates and, however, he can use such constructions correctly, even without being aware of it, because, whenever a certain amount of objects (books, pencils, toys) accumulates, a pile thereof goes up with the quantity and goes down when objects are taken out of it.

Of course, orientational metaphors are not indispensable in the economic language, but, due to their deep rooting in everyday thought, one can barely find a single economy paper or book without an orientational metaphor. They provide complex and creative ways of expressing the trends of various indicators, such as economic growth, profit, capital, income, revenues, expenses, inflation, prices, unemployment, salaries, risks, leverage, assets, receivables and so on. What is more important is the fact that orientational metaphors belong to linguistic universals. They operate primarily at the level of thought and then at the linguistic level, and their conceptualization is present in every language. This is another reason for their ubiquitous presence in the business language. This type of language must be clear, concise and unequivocal. If they were characteristic of a certain language, as is the case of idioms or phrasal verbs for example, orientational metaphors could hardly be subject to word-by-word translation, as there is a high chance that awkward and odd constructions may result. However, given their linguistic universality, orientational metaphors are perfectly transferable, lexeme by lexeme, from one language to another and, even though they may not always sound fully accurate, they would be perfectly understandable. For instance, both a native speaker and a basic, non-expert foreign speaker of English know that, when prices go up, they increase, because it is the same concept involved by the Spanish *los precios suben*, the German *Preise steigen*, the French *les prix haussent* and the Romanian *prețurile urcă*.

We shall illustrate this point by means of real items of corpus, retrieved from the internet, from newspapers or specialized websites in the field of economy, in English, Spanish and Romanian. It has to be clear that the list below is not exhaustive; the economic language, just as everyday language, contains many constructions based on orientational metaphors.

English:

*Despite the **high** level of debt, the company's stock still **soared** to high levels.*

(<http://stocks.investopedia.com/stock-analysis/2010/Do-Debt-Levels-Predict-Stock-Prices-GRMN-TRMA-FCX-MGRC0323.aspx>)

*When inflation **goes up**, there is a **decline** in the purchasing power of money.*

(<http://www.investopedia.com/university/inflation/inflation1.asp>)

*Just as inflation **goes high**, the price of gold also goes **upward** and balances the amount of savings.*

([http://ibvgold.com/index.php?option=com\\_myblog&show=The-Bullion-Can-Save-You.html&Itemid=8](http://ibvgold.com/index.php?option=com_myblog&show=The-Bullion-Can-Save-You.html&Itemid=8))

*Twitter growth **goes through the roof**.*

(<http://www.thetechherald.com/article.php/200916/3466/Twitter-growth-goes-through-the-roof>)

*Fuel prices **go down** Tuesday.*

(<http://www.thedailyherald.com/islands/1-news/4422-fuel-prices-go-down-tuesday.html>)

Spanish:

*La tendencia **ascendente** del dólar canadiense está en riesgo ya que el posicionamiento está sólidamente sobrevendido. (<http://www.forexpros.es/fundamental/analisis/la-tendencia-ascendente-del-d%25C3%25B3lar-canadiense-est%25C3%25A1-en-riesgo-ya-que-el-posicionamiento-est%25C3%25A1-s%25C3%25B3lidamente-sobrevendido-36087>)*

***Creció** la desocupación en el tercer trimestre de 2009. Según el Indec, el indicador **subió** a 9,1%, y marcó un **avance** de 1,3 puntos respecto al mismo período del año pasado. La tasa de desocupación **ascendió** en el tercer trimestre a 9,1%. (...) La tasa de desocupación se ubicó en 8,8% al cierre del segundo trimestre, lo que implicó un **alza** de 0,8 puntos respecto a igual período del año pasado, según el Indec. (<http://www.cronista.com/notas/212214-crecio-la-desocupacion-el-tercer-trimestre-2009>)*

*Por la lluvia faltan verduras y los precios **se dispararon por las nubes**.*

([http://www.lavoz901.com.ar/despachos.asp?cod\\_des=97143&ID\\_Seccion=12](http://www.lavoz901.com.ar/despachos.asp?cod_des=97143&ID_Seccion=12))

*Zapatero anuncia que las pensiones **subirán** si la inflación **supera** el 1%.*

(<http://www.sitiosespana.com/notas/2010/mayo/zapatero-inflacion.htm>)

**Subidón** histórico en la Bolsa española. El Ibex-35 de la Bolsa de Madrid **escaló el cielo**, con la mayor **subida** de su historia. (<http://archenaneconomicas.blogspot.com/2010/05/subidon-historico-en-la-bolsa-espanola.html>)

El mercado inmobiliario **se desploma**. La venta de pisos **desciende** un 27% y en algunas comunidades más del 40%. Las hipotecas para viviendas sufren la mayor **caída** registrada nunca por el INE. (...) De **aterrizaje** suave, nada. El mercado inmobiliario **se tambalea**. Los promotores llevaban tiempo hablando de que en el último semestre de 2007 las ventas **habían caído** en torno al 40%, pero no manejaban datos oficiales. ([http://www.elpais.com/articulo/economia/mercado/inmobiliario/desploma/elpepico/20080327elpepico\\_4/Tes](http://www.elpais.com/articulo/economia/mercado/inmobiliario/desploma/elpepico/20080327elpepico_4/Tes))

**Romanian:**

Turismul brașovean a intrat pe o **pantă descendentă**.

(<http://brasov.time4news.ro/ultima-ora/turismul-brasovean-a-intrat-pe-o-panta-descendent/>)

De ce **a picat** bursa românească, într-o singură zi, cu 10%?

(<http://www.romanialibera.ro/bani-afaceri/bursa/de-ce-a-picat-bursa-romaneasca-intr-o-singura-zi-cu-10-187702.html>)

Piața materialelor de construcții **s-a prăbușit** până la nivelul din 2005.

(<http://www.eurourbanism.ro/articol.php?id=6653>)

Rata șomajului va atinge **un vârf** în prima parte a lui 2010, dar acesta se va plasa probabil sub 10%.

(<http://www.bloombiz.ro/cariere/banca-mondiala-varful-somajului-in-romania-va-fi-atins-in-prima-parte-din-2010>)

Până la ora actuală, datele despre inflație au reflectat prea puțin **tendința ascendentă** de un an a economiei japoneze.

([http://www.ghiseulbancar.ro/articole/109/5518/Cum\\_vor\\_evolutia\\_dobanda\\_valuta\\_si\\_piata\\_de\\_capital.htm](http://www.ghiseulbancar.ro/articole/109/5518/Cum_vor_evolutia_dobanda_valuta_si_piata_de_capital.htm))

Prețul cerealelor **a sărit în aer** din cauza stocurilor mici din SUA.

(<http://www.zf.ro/business-international/prețul-cerealelor-a-sarit-in-aer-din-cauza-stocurilor-mici-din-sua-3105457/>)

Economia **este la pământ**, viitoarea tranșă nu va mai merge în salarii și pensii.

([http://www.financiarul.com/articol\\_43816/fmi-economia-este-la-pamant-viitoarea-transa-nu-va-mai-merge-in-salarii-si-pensii.html](http://www.financiarul.com/articol_43816/fmi-economia-este-la-pamant-viitoarea-transa-nu-va-mai-merge-in-salarii-si-pensii.html))

Several conclusions may be drawn after analyzing the examples above. First and foremost, the constructions marked in bold are built around the same pattern (*more is up, less is down*) in all three languages. The mechanism is very similar, although lexicalization is made by various means. We may see that in Spanish and Romanian the orientational metaphors are mainly lexicalized by means of nouns or verbs, unlike in English, where many metaphors are based on the adverbial component of the phrasal verbs (*go up, go down*). This is due to the fact that there is no such construction as phrasal verbs in Spanish and Romanian, hence *go up* and *go down* have no exact lexical correspondent in these languages. Idioms are used in many cases (*go through the roof, dispararse por las nubes, a fi la pământ*), which proves how deeply rooted in language these metaphors are. From this point of view, we may notice that Spanish and Romanian are much more similar to one another. The idiom *a fi la pământ*, for instance, has a fully identical correspondent in the Spanish phrase *estar por los suelos*, but this does not occur in English. On the other hand, however, there is no exact transfer of *to go through the roof* into Spanish and Romanian.

### Conclusions

The hereby paper has tried to present a set of issues regarding the English, Spanish and Romanian names for some set structures (nominal groups and orientational metaphors) in business terminology. It has been shown that, even though lexicalisation of metaphors may sometimes be different, conceptualisation is always the same, due to the existence of certain conceptual prototypes, possessed since childhood and materialised in the language use, by means of the metaphorical projection. Contradicting a more or less widely enounced myth, according to which specialized translation should not raise as many problems as literary or colloquial translation, we have seen that even financial terms that have been recently introduced in Romanian (in a period when the advance of technology facilitated literal borrowings or calques) give rise to differences in lexicalization, for several reasons.

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