EXPLORING SOCIAL REALITY IN ROMANIAN, ENGLISH AND FRENCH ANTONYMIC PHRASEOLOGIES: "SUCCESS" AND "UNSUCCESS"

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Abstract: This paper examines the social reality and cultural relativity surrounding the concepts of 'success' and 'unsuccess' across Romanian, English and French phraseologies and the way they are reflective of the values, norms, and aspirations of a society. Drawing upon cognitive linguistics theories, the analysis delves into linguistic expressions and cultural narratives related to 'success' and 'unsuccess', while also considering the biographies of prominent figures such as Queen Elizabeth II, Coco Chanel and Queen Mary of Romania. By comparing linguistic representations and cultural attitudes towards success and unsuccess in these three languages, this study aims to highlight both the similarities and differences between societies and their perceptions of achievement and failure.

Keywords: phraseology, antonymy, social reality, cultural relativity, success, unsuccess.

Introduction

The way people think about other people or themselves, and how they act upon their thoughts contributes greatly to creating the reality they live in. The language they use reflects and shapes societal attitudes and values.

Success and *unsuccess* are complex, multifaceted concepts that vary greatly across different cultures and languages. While universally recognized, their meanings and interpretations are deeply influenced by social, historical, and cultural contexts. This paper explores the linguistic and cultural dimensions of *success* and *unsuccess* in Romanian, English and French, shedding light on the diverse ways in which these concepts are understood and valued within each society.

From the perspective of social reality, the aforementioned concepts are analyzed based on social structures and relationships, such as cultural norms, power dynamics, and institutional arrangements, which play a pivotal role in shaping language use and cognition. Cognitive linguistics offers valuable insights into how these social phenomena influence linguistic patterns and conceptualizations. This paper delves into the theoretical underpinnings of cognitive linguistics and highlights the contributions of renowned scholars in understanding the dynamic interplay between social reality, social structures, and language.

Cultural relativity plays a significant role in shaping these linguistic representations of *success* and *unsuccess*. In Western societies like those influenced by English-speaking cultures, individualism and competition are often celebrated, leading to a focus on personal achievement and the pursuit of success. In contrast, Eastern European cultures like Romania may place greater emphasis on communal values, familial obligations, and resilience in the face of adversity. Coco Chanel's biography provides a relevant cultural reference point for understanding the complexities of the two studied concepts. As a pioneering fashion designer, Chanel achieved remarkable success in a male-dominated industry, symbolizing the idea of self-made success and breaking traditional norms. However, her journey was also marked by personal struggles and setbacks, including periods of financial difficulty and controversy. Chanel's story exemplifies the multifaceted nature of success and the importance of perseverance in the face of adversity, transcending linguistic and cultural boundaries.

By examining language as a cognitive phenomenon situated within socio-cultural contexts, cognitive linguists illuminate the ways in which societal norms, power dynamics, and cultural schemas shape linguistic patterns and conceptualizations. Through theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, researchers continue to unravel the intricate relationship between language and society, shedding light on the dynamic nature of human communication and cognition.

Social Reality

Social reality comes as a result of well-defined and constant patterns of human interaction, which can evolve to become independent within a community. Finn Collin says in his work, *Social Reality*, that *Human beings make their own world* (Collin, 1997: 1). The individual interacts with his fellows and modifies his actions according to the members of a specific social framework, generating a system of tacit norms. Social relationships, social structures and the related institutions bring into being social reality (Collin, 1997: 2).

The way individuals think, talk, consider things and explain, and also the concepts they use to grasp their environment, constitute social facts. These are intellectual processes that cognize, explain and classify a shared cognition. Social facts go so far as the individual is capable of establishing them, they do not go further than man's capacity to know and understand (Collin, 1997: 48).

Cognitive linguistics posits that language is deeply intertwined with cognitive processes, and both are influenced by social and cultural contexts. So, language is not a neutral reflection of an objective reality, but rather an intricate web of meanings shaped by cognitive, social, and cultural factors (Evans & Green, 2006). According to Langacker (1987), linguistic expressions reflect *cognitive construals* of the world, which are shaped by social and cultural factors. Construal operations involve the selective highlighting of certain aspects of a situation while backgrounding others. Social factors, such as cultural norms and values, influence how individuals construe and interpret linguistic expressions. For instance, the linguistic encoding of politeness may vary across cultures, reflecting differing social expectations regarding interpersonal communication. Moreover, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) propose the theory of conceptual metaphor, suggesting that abstract concepts are often understood through metaphorical mappings grounded in embodied experiences and cultural schemas. Metaphors serve as cognitive tools for conceptualizing abstract domains based on familiar, embodied schemas. For example, the metaphor of "argument is war" frames discourse in terms of conflict, shaping linguistic expressions and rhetorical strategies.

In order to analyze the concepts of *success* and *unsuccess* across Romanian, English and French phraseologies it is required to delve into cognitive linguistics, cultural relativity, and social reality. These concepts are deeply embedded in language and are reflective of the values, norms, and aspirations of a society. To understand the similarities and differences between Romanian, English and French perspectives on *success* and *unsuccess*, as well as their cultural implications, we can draw upon theories of cognitive linguistics and explore relevant cultural references such as biographies of famous people.

The examples that are used in this article, concerning the concepts of *success* and *unsuccess*, are phraseological units collected from the autobiography *Povestea vieții mele* by Regina Maria, Queen Mary of Romania for the Romanian linguistic picture and the biography *Queen of Our Times, The Life of Elizabeth II*, written by Robert Hardman for the English phraseology. Both tell the lives of monarchs starting with the background of their birth, continuing with the challenges they faced as royals and closing with the moments closer to their ends. The French examples are collected from the biography *L'Irrégulière ou Mon itinéraire Chanel*, written by Edmonde Charles-Roux, telling the life of Gabrielle Chanel, or the famous fashion designer and businesswoman Coco Chanel, as the world knows her.

Table 1. The concept of SUCCESS

A. Romanian	***B. English***	***C. French***
A.1. *Îndată ce omul pune mai multă luare aminte asupra altora decât asupra sa însuşi, piere orice sfială. Siguranţa de sine nu e îngâmfare ci izbândă asupra propriei noastre fiinţe* (p. 24)	**B.1.** *The film had landed 'at the end of a very dark period' for the monarchy and its timing was crucial* (p. 173)	**C.1.** *Ce style dont personne ne pouvait ignorer le nom : le style Chanel.* (p. 102)
A.2. *Eram un copil al firei, nu am fost oprită de la nimic, nimic nu-mi încătuşase voinţa; aşa dar am fost în stare să trec cu ramuri cu tot printr'un perete de piatră...* (p. 39)	**B.2.** *A confident, secure monarch was now reigning on her own terms and in her own image.* (p. 179)	**C.2.** *« J'ai déjà eu un protecteur du nom d'Etienne. Lui aussi faisait des miracles. »* (p. 131)
A.3. *Aceasta însă era o şcoală bună în care îţi întăreai muşchii şi dacă aveai o fire vânjoasă care să nu se frângă, îţi sădea în suflet o putere de fier cu care să înfrunţi încercările, greutăţile şi renunţările vieţii* (p. 72)	**B.3.** *The Queen began by noting that 'no marriage can hope to succeed without a deliberate effort to be tolerant and understanding'* (p. 192)	**C.3.** *« Je lui ai mis le pied à l'étrier. »* (p. 131)
A.4. *Iar Unchiul, care veni mai târziu, îmi spuse că eram acum ca un soldat care a trecut prin foc.* (p. 73)	**B.4.** *Monarchy in general was on something of a roll across Europe, with a newcomer to the ranks.* (p. 203)	**C.4.** *De quelle force est l'ignorance chez ceux qui, par tempérament, savent oser ! La plus simple façon de braver l'opinion, n'est-elle pas encore de la braver sans le savoir ?* (p. 167)
A.5. *„Cei puternici merg înainte şi nu îngăduie nici unei păreri de rău, nici unei remuşcări, nici unei recriminări, să le stăvilească înaintarea".* (p. 493)	**B.5.** *Her longstanding mantra that she has to 'be seen to be believed'* (p. 210)	**C.5.** *Gabrielle ne se limitait plus au rôle de spectatrice, elle participait*. (p. 338)
A.6. *„Ca toţi pribegii acestei lumi, trebuia să mă supun în aparenţă tiraniei fiecărei zile, însă în lăuntrul fiinţei mele am ajuns totuşi ceace doream să fiu."* (p. 494)	**B.6.** *'She's a perfect sovereign,'* (p. 216)	**C.6.** *Encore une fois, si rien ne permet d'affirmer qu'elle vivait un bonheur sans ombre, tout permet de dire qu'elle reprenait confiance.* (p. 347)
A.7. *„Ziua de mâine poate va fi a ta, dacă îţi va fi mâna destul de puternică pentru a o cuprinde".* (p. 498)	**B.7.** *'A nation defended by such men and loved by such women must sooner or later attain victory'.* (p. 59)	

To analyze the social construction of *success* and *unsuccess*, a cognitive linguistic framework is employed, which emphasizes the role of language in shaping our perceptions and experiences. According to cognitive linguistics, language reflects cognitive processes and cultural schemas, influencing how individuals conceptualize abstract concepts like ones studied in this article.

In example A.1. extracted from Romanian phraseology, Queen Mary of Romania emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and self-confidence. The cognitive analysis involves understanding the role of attention, self-perception, and the concept of success as an achievement within one's own being. The contrast between genuine self-confidence and arrogance directed at the people around her is highlighted, revealing cognitive distinctions in the understanding of success.

Cognitive linguistics is applied to explore the concept of success as determination and willpower in the Romanian example A.2. The metaphor of branches passing through a stone wall suggests resilience and the cognitive processes associated with overcoming obstacles. The focus is on the individual who must stand up to those around her and the cognitive representation of personal strength in the face of challenges.

The metaphor of being like a soldier who has passed through fire from example A.4. suggests transformation and resilience. The use of such metaphors shapes the perception of personal growth and success, linking the individual's experiences to the broader societal understanding of strength and accomplishment.

The English example B.1. suggests the impact of historical events on the monarchy. The cognitive linguistic analysis involves understanding how Queen Elizabeth II perceives and communicates the temporal dimension of success. The use of 'dark period' implies a negative and challenging phase for the monarchy, and the emphasis on timing indicates the significance of the film's release in relation to the monarchy's image and success.

In example B.2. collected from the English phraseology, cognitive linguistics can be applied to explore the concept of success as confidence, security, and personal agency in the Queen's reign. The use of 'on her own terms' emphasizes autonomy and control, reflecting the cognitive processes associated with self-perception and self-determination in the context of success.

Example B.3. delves into the cognitive aspects of interpersonal relationships and the role of tolerance and understanding in the success of a marriage. Queen Elizabeth II's words reflect a cognitive perspective on the prerequisites for success in the context of social institutions like marriage.

For the French perspective, example C.1. highlights the cognitive association between the name 'Chanel' and a distinctive style. The phrase 'dont personne ne pouvait ignorer le nom' (whose name nobody could ignore) indicates the cognitive impact of Chanel's brand and the societal recognition of her unique style. This suggests the cognitive link between personal identity, success, and public perception.

The mention of a protector named Etienne in the French example C.2. and the attribution of miraculous abilities involve cognitive processes related to interpersonal relationships and success. The use of 'faisait des miracles' (he was doing miracles) implies a cognitive evaluation of the protector's influence, suggesting that success can be attributed to external factors and collaborations within a social context.

Example C.5.: 'Gabrielle ne se limitait plus au rôle de spectatrice, elle participait' involves the shift in cognitive roles — from being a spectator to actively participating. The use of 'ne se limitait plus' (no longer limited to) implies a change in perception and engagement, reflecting a cognitive transformation related to success and involvement in societal activities.

Social structures exert significant influence on language through processes such as lexicalization, grammaticalization, and discourse conventions. For instance, Slobin (1996) argues that linguistic relativity, or the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, suggests that language both reflects and shapes cognition, with different linguistic structures leading to distinct cognitive patterns.

Analyzing the concepts of success across Romanian, English and French phraseologies reveals both similarities and differences in cultural attitudes and social realities. By employing theories of cognitive linguistics and drawing upon relevant cultural references such as the life of the two monarchs and Coco Chanel's biography, we can gain deeper insights into how language shapes our understanding of these fundamental human experiences.

Table 2. The concept of UNSUCCESS

D. Romanian	***E. English***	***F. French***

D.1. *Chiar de pe atunci, în anii cei dintâi, bietele mele rădăcini se striveau de acel zid.* (p. 31)	**E.1.** *'The inexorable weight of history bore down on the kneeling youth,'* (p. 174)	**F.1.** *« Ne m'expliquez pas ce que je ressens, lui dit-elle. Je le sais depuis mon plus jeune âge. On m'a tout arraché et je suis morte... J'ai connu ça à douze ans. On peut mourir plusieurs fois au cours d'une vie, vous savez... »* (p. 80)
D.2. *Era o neîncetată renunţare, o predare a propriei voinţe în o necurmată osândă de a vedea pe alţii făcându-şi voia şi stăpânind cu bucurie lucrurile, de la care noi eram opriţi.* (p. 38)	**E.2.** *'I wouldn't describe it as a collapse'. 'But, whatever it was, she'd got through all this with huge relief and she just didn't feel like going on for a few days. It was totally unlike her.'* (p. 174)	**F.2.** *Etienne faisait d'elle sa maîtresse, soit. Mais il ne s'attendait pas à ce qu'elle assumât la charge de maîtresse de maison.* (p. 158)
D.3. *Dar simt că în mine s'a frânt un resort; cu mine nu era nevoe să fie cineva atât de aspru, fusesem crescut într'o neştirbită închinare faţă de datorie* (p. 38)	**E.3.** *Divorce for any marriage which had 'irretrievably broken down'.* (p. 165)	**F.3.** *Gabrielle croyait échapper au sort quelle redoutait le plus : celui de femme entretenue.* (p. 162)
D.4. *nici un colţişor ademenitor nu putusem stoarce din eleganţa lui pretenţioasă şi neprimitoare. îmi pierdusem vlaga, […] odaia semăna cu un câmp de luptă după înfrângere; fusesem învinsă în bătălie.* (p. 39)	**E.4.** *'Grief is the price we pay for love'.* (p. 370)	**F.4.** *Cette aventure que Gabrielle s'était délibérément choisie, ne semblait pas porter tous les fruits qu'elle pouvait en attendre. Moulins n'était pas Paris.* (p. 126)
D.5. *„ Lucru ciudat: mi se păru o întreagă tragedie. Simţeam întrucâtva că fusesem prinsă în cursă. ".* (p. 41)		**F.5.** *Sa réponse était là, dans un geste de lassitude et sa façon de dire : « Je n'avais plus le coeur... ».* (p. 434)

To dive right into the cognitive analysis of the concept of *unsuccess*, the Romanian example D.1. suggests a metaphorical representation of obstacles or challenges faced early on. The use of 'rădăcini' (roots) being 'strivite de acel zid' (crushed by that wall) implies a cognitive struggle against barriers. This could reflect early signs of difficulties or impediments in Queen Mary's life that she perceives as hindering her growth or success.

Example D.2. involves understanding the cognitive processes related to continuous surrender and the feeling of being condemned to witness others enjoying what is denied to oneself. The language used reflects a sense of resignation and a cognitive awareness of social structures that restrict one's autonomy and success.

Example D.3. focuses on the metaphorical breaking of a spring, representing a loss of resilience or strength. The cognitive processes involved include self-awareness and an understanding of the impact of external influences, such as harsh treatment. The mention of being raised with a 'neştirbită închinare faţă de datorie' (undistorted devotion to duty) reflects the cognitive values and expectations ingrained in social structures.

From a cognitive linguistic standpoint, example E.1. from the English phraseology utilizes metaphorical language, describing the weight of history pressing down on an individual. The term 'inexorable' suggests an unavoidable and relentless force. The cognitive analysis involves understanding how the language being used reflects a sense of burden that might lead to failure and the impact of historical context on individuals, highlighting the social reality where historical weight can influence personal experiences and outcomes.

Example E.2. involves the use of negation and contrast to describe an emotional state. The phrase ‘she just didn’t feel like going on for a few days’ conveys a temporary sense of unsuccess or emotional strain. The cognitive processes here include the assessment of one's emotional well-being and the impact of personal experiences on one's usual demeanor within the context of social expectations and responsibilities.

The phrase ‘price we pay’ from example E.4. in the English phraseology suggests a transactional aspect to emotional experiences. The cognitive analysis involves understanding how the concept of unsuccess represented by grief is framed within the context of love, highlighting the interplay between personal emotions and societal expectations surrounding relationships.

Turning to the French phraseology, example F.1. reflects a cognitive perspective on personal failure and the feeling of being stripped of everything. The use of metaphors like ‘tout arraché’ (everything torn away) and ‘je suis morte’ (I am dead) conveys a sense of emotional devastation. The mention of experiencing this at the age of twelve suggests the cognitive impact of early traumas on one's perception of self and life. The phrase ‘On peut mourir plusieurs fois au cours d'une vie’ (One can die several times in a lifetime) indicates a cognitive understanding of the recurring nature of hardship.

Example F.3. involves the cognitive processes associated with personal fears and societal expectations. The phraseological unit ‘femme entretenue’ (kept woman) conveys a negative societal perception, and Chanel's desire to escape this fate reflects cognitive strategies for avoiding perceived unsuccess within social structures.

Example F.5. from the French phraseology involves cognitive processes related to emotional exhaustion and the impact on personal decisions. The phrase ‘Je n'avais plus le cœur’ (I no longer had the heart) conveys a cognitive and emotional state contributing to the concept of unsuccess. The language choice reflects the complex interplay of emotions and cognitive evaluations within the context of personal choices and societal expectations.

As an overall image, the examples analyzed in this chapter provide a glimpse into the cognitive experiences of success and unsuccess, portraying metaphors, and language choices that reflect the individual’s perceptions of obstacles, surrender, and the impact of social structures on one’s journey. The analysis offers insights into the cognitive processes associated with adversity and the negotiation of personal success within the context of societal constraints. The analysis explores how language choices reflect cognitive processes, individual experiences, and the broader social realities and structures that influence the concepts of success and unsuccess in personal and institutional contexts.

Cultural relativity

In understanding cultural relativity, both symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology provide valuable perspectives that emphasize the role of symbols, language, and social interactions in shaping individuals' perceptions of reality. Drawing upon insights from cognitive linguistics, this paper explores the interplay between language, culture, and cognition within the frameworks of entire societies.

Wilhelm von Humboldt suggests that language and the spirit of a people are intricately linked. This reflects the cultural relativity concept, which posits that each culture has its unique worldview, values, and ways of expressing them through language: ‘Language is, as it were, the outer appearance of the spirit of a people, the language is their spirit and the spirit their language; we can never think of them sufficiently as identical’ (Humboldt 1988:46). The quote implies that understanding a language is key to comprehending the underlying cultural and spiritual dimensions of a community. Therefore, language is not considered a mere set of labels, but it contributes fundamentally to the constitution of the conceptual structure.

Symbolic interactionism, as articulated by George Herbert Mead (1934), emphasizes the symbolic nature of human interaction and the importance of shared meanings in social life.

According to Mead, individuals interpret and respond to symbols based on the meanings they attribute to them, which are shaped by social interactions within specific cultural contexts. This aligns with the idea that language is a symbolic system through which meaning is negotiated and constructed (Evans & Green, 2006). This is why social facts become a function of the identity of a society (Collin: 1997: 48).

Ethnomethodology, developed by Harold Garfinkel (1967), focuses on the study of how individuals make sense of their social worlds through everyday practices. Central to ethnomethodological inquiry is the notion of 'indexicality', wherein meaning is contingent upon the specific social context in which it is produced and interpreted. This perspective underscores the cultural relativity of social norms, rules, and interpretations, as individuals actively construct and negotiate reality through their interactions with others. Collin says that 'social facts are constructed on the basis of principles of rationality that are somehow *valid* for, but not necessarily *endorsed* by, the society in question (Collin, 1997: 53).

Analyzing the examples from the biographies of Coco Chanel, Queen Mary of Romania, and Queen Elizabeth II offers valuable insights into the cultural differences and similarities surrounding the concepts of *success* and *unsuccess*. While Chanel's emphasis on individual effort and overcoming obstacles resonates with French notions of success, Queen Mary's focus on personal growth aligns with Romanian values of resilience. Queen Elizabeth II's reflection on the price of love underscores British cultural stoicism and emotional resilience in the face of adversity. Through a comparative analysis, arise both similarities and differences in the conceptualization of success and unsuccess across English, French, and Romanian cultures. While certain themes may be universal, such as the pursuit of excellence and the fear of failure, cultural specificities shape the ways in which these concepts are understood and valued. For example, the emphasis on individualism in English-speaking cultures contrasts with the emphasis on collective achievement in French and Romanian societies.

In short, the perspectives of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology offer valuable insights into cultural relativity, highlighting the dynamic and context-dependent nature of social interactions and meanings. By integrating insights from cognitive linguistics, researchers can further explore the cognitive processes underlying language use and interpretation, advancing our understanding of how cultural norms, symbols, and practices shape individuals' perceptions and experiences of reality.

Conclusions

This paper highlighted the importance of recognizing social reality and cultural relativity in understanding the dynamics of *success* and *unsuccess*. By acknowledging the diversity of cultural perspectives, greater cross-cultural understanding and appreciation are fostered. Together with embracing cultural diversity, we can enrich our understanding of *success* and *unsuccess*, and work towards a more inclusive and harmonious society.

The concepts of *success* and *unsuccess* are inherently shaped by cultural, linguistic, and historical factors. By examining phraseologies across English, French, and Romanian languages, as well as the biographies of influential figures, we can gain a deeper understanding of the diverse ways in which societies define and perceive success.

Examining the biographies of Coco Chanel, Queen Mary of Romania, and Queen Elizabeth II offers further insights into cultural attitudes towards success and unsuccess. Coco Chanel, a pioneering fashion designer, epitomized the idea of self-made success, breaking barriers in a male-dominated industry. Her story illustrates the transformative power of ambition and creativity in achieving societal recognition.

Queen Mary of Romania, known for her diplomatic skills and philanthropy, navigated the challenges of monarchy during a tumultuous period in Romanian history. Her reign symbolizes resilience and adaptability in the face of political upheaval, highlighting alternative measures of success beyond mere material wealth or power.

Queen Elizabeth II, the longest-reigning monarch in British history, embodies stability and continuity in a rapidly changing world. Her commitment to duty and service reflects traditional British values of loyalty and responsibility, shaping perceptions of success within the context of monarchy.

Across these cultures, success is often portrayed as a product of resilience, determination, and individual effort. However, the nuances in linguistic expressions and cultural narratives reflect distinct societal values and priorities. While French culture celebrates the pursuit of excellence and individual achievement, Romanian culture places emphasis on resilience and personal growth. In contrast, British culture values stoicism and emotional resilience in the face of adversity.

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