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A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF IDIOMS WITH A ZOONYM COMPONENT IN ENGLISH AND BOSNIAN/CROATIAN/SERBIAN

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to offer insight on how English idioms containing the zoonym component are translated into Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BCS). The analysis includes 82 examples of English idioms taken from the lexicographic source, bilingual dictionary, which were then categorized according to their zoonym constituents and employed translation strategies. The results show that the most frequent translation strategy is the one of null equivalence. In other words, due to the lack of identical or similar structure in the target language, a complete paraphrase of an idiom with a zoonym component is the most frequently employed translation strategy. The paper also indicates the need for further research related to the comprehension and translation of idioms in English for the speakers of BCS.

Key words: idioms, translation, zoonyms, equivalence

Introduction

Idiomatic expressions have proven to be quite difficult to understand (Mäntylä, 2004), and even more so to translate, especially to non-native speakers (Baker, 2018, p. 70). Forko (2009) even refers to the translation of phrasemes, which include idioms, as 'Sisyphus job'. Moreover, as phraseological idiomatic expressions are often influenced by various cultural factors (Forko, 2009, p. 94), contrastive analysis of idioms in various languages is a very productive avenue of linguistic research and it can help shed further light into the use of idiomatic expressions.

Therefore, cultural understanding is accepted as a fundamentally important factor for the comprehension of idioms, and phraseological units in general. Illustrative of this is the fact that particular idioms inspired by certain cultures do not have their counterparts in the target languages and linguists often warn of this issue (Baker, 2018; Oualif, 2017) emphasizing the significance of understanding not only the target language, but also culture. For example, idioms including colors may be interpreted completely differently in various languages, as is the case between English and Arabic, primarily because of the cultural influence (Salim & Mehawesh, 2013). Nonetheless, it is important to mention that there is a certain number of idioms with shared origins and/or influences which include, for example, expressions stemming from biblical stories or Greek and Latin myths. Such idioms with origins often shared between a number of languages frequently result in more direct translation equivalents (e.g. trojan horse) (Spicijarić Paškvan, & Turk, 2014).

However, problems related to idiom comprehension can stem not only from the aforementioned cultural differences, but also from the noted partial similarities between the two languages. Baker (2018, p. 74) states that an idiom might be misinterpreted when there is an idiom in the target language which has a similar counterpart but "its context of use may be different; the two expressions may have different connotations, for instance, or they may not be pragmatically transferable". As can be concluded, a general issue with language learning can be found in any partial similarities between the languages as they can easily lead to false-friend pairs and other negative transfers which, in turn, cause comprehension and translation problems. In other words, in the context of idioms, same zoonym components with different assigned meanings across languages complicate both the comprehension and translation of such idiomatic expressions. The same is applicable to different zoonym components used in the employed translation equivalents.

Within this context, idioms containing zoonyms as a lexical component are particularly interesting as they seem plentiful in many languages. Due to their specific metaphorical meanings, their understanding is already an important issue; even more so from the translation standpoint. In the same way that animals share some core characteristics, zoonym lexical components depicting them act accordingly. However, it is always useful to note which particular characteristic is primarily tied to which particular animal within a language (*as hungry as a bear* compared to *gladan kao vuk*). The next step then includes trying to account for such, and any other similarities or differences noted across languages. For example, it is possible to ascribe some of the difference between the languages to etymological errors (Varlamova et al., 2017, p. 483). Such explanations also provide reasoning behind the choice of the employed translation strategies, and the findings can even be used for the development of various strategies for teaching and learning idioms. For example, animals tied only to a certain region may not be present in that many languages, unless they have been presented through stories and narratives. Furthermore, language contact and consequent influences can be an additional point of interest for further analysis (Lieberman, 2021). These are just some of the factors that need to be taken into consideration when trying to address various questions connected to the comprehension and translation of idiomatic expressions.

Due to all the aforementioned reasons, contrastive research into idioms is incredibly significant as it is of crucial importance for the translation process and idiom comprehension. Idioms containing zoonyms as their lexical components are of particular interest because they are influenced by a variety of factors, not only cultural ones, and their meanings being highly metaphorical in nature add to the complexity of their semantics.

Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to expound on the employed translation strategies of idioms containing the zoonym component when contrasting Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BCS) and English and to showcase the distribution of idioms based on the specific zoonym component in the two focus languages.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Definition and classification of idiomatic expressions

Defining and classifying phraseological units, idioms included, is quite a complex task. The definition and criteria differ a lot, and, as a result, so do the final classification systems. Therefore, depending on the theoretical approach one subscribes to, idioms may include various fixed expressions that satisfy idiomaticity criteria. Categorization differs significantly from a few types of idioms to more inclusive, less restrictive classification systems such as Makkai's (1972) division into lexemic and sememic idioms containing subclasses such as proverbs and irreversible binomials. However, most classification systems and approaches to defining idioms adhere to quite similar criteria, with the most frequently used criterion being "the one related to their non-compositionality. In other words, the meaning of idioms cannot be predicted from the meaning of their constituent parts" (Grant & Bauer, 2004, p. 40). On the other hand, as Mäntylä (2004) explains, earlier beliefs that the meanings of idioms are arbitrary and need to be learned through memorization have been challenged through more recent studies. This distinction is also reflected in various semantic classification systems of idioms so it is possible to use a tripartite classification system of "pure" idioms, literal idioms, and semi idioms (Fernando, 1996, pp. 35-36).

As idioms are a subcategory of phraseological units, it is necessary to consider the chief characteristics of phraseological units that then extend to idioms as their subset. According to Glasser (1998, p. 125) a phraseological unit is: "a more or less lexicalized, reproducible billexemic or polylexemic word-group in common use, which has syntactic and semantic stability, may be dramatized, may carry connotations, and may have an emphatic or intensifying function in a text". Under this theoretical approach, all of the dictionary tokens chosen for this study can be broadly referred to as simply phraseological units. That is a common approach which helps overcome previously mentioned differences related to categorization and nomenclature of idioms.

Idioms, as a subset of phraseological units, can be defined as "frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and (...) often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components" (Baker, 2018, p. 69). It is possible to yet again note the importance of the non-compositionality criteria, even though Baker's approach is not as restrictive as can be seen from the definition. Baker's criteria for idiom classification include inability to: change word order within the idiomatic structure, delete or add words to it, replace one of the elements with another, or make changes in its grammatical structure (Baker, 2018, pp. 69-70). As it was stated prior, there are a number of classification systems of idioms, be it from semantic, syntactic or other theoretical approaches. For example, the aforementioned idiom classification system by Makkai (1972) represents just one example of idiom classification from a semantic standpoint. However, Baker's approach, on account of its specificity and yet non-restrictiveness, has often been employed as a standard approach in terms of idiom analysis. The current research relies on this theoretical approach, both in terms of defining and classifying idioms and implementing particular translation strategies.

To reiterate, the most prominent criteria used when referring to or classifying idioms is that of non-compositionality of idioms, that is, the fact that the meaning of idioms cannot be deduced from their constituents. However, that is not enough to adequately define idioms and the need for more precise, perhaps even restrictive, definition has been proposed (Cacciari, 1993, p. 34; Grant and Bauer, 2004, p. 40). Cacciari (1993, p. 27) rightfully warns that “the task of defining what an idiomatic expression is, and how it is acquired and understood, is still a rather difficult and controversial one”.

Idioms with a zoonym lexical component

Particularities of the semantics of idioms are immensely complex and frequently require further research as there are many levels of their understanding that have yet to be researched fully. Therefore, as Mäntylä (2004, p. 27) states that “the effect of idiom characteristics on their comprehension as such has not been studied”, idioms containing zoonym components are of particular interest due to their complexity. Not only do general idiom criteria apply with this idiom subset as well, but the importance of their metaphorical interpretations and assigned stereotypes shapes an additional layer to uncover and explain. Bertoša (1999, pp. 68-69) explains how certain animals are viewed through particular stereotypes and qualities and, thus, through comparison, such qualities are assigned to humans as well. This symbolism is what Varlamova et al. (2017, p. 481) mention as well when talking about associative meanings of zonyms. In general, through such stereotypes and metaphorical interpretations it is possible to anthropomorphize animals and compare ourselves to them which is why “animalistic phraseology is a huge layer of phraseological units and is one of the most common forms of the language nomination” (Varlamova et al., 2017, p. 478). In fact, zonyms remain such an essential part of the phraseological units that they take the role of “the semantic center” (Varlamova et al., 2017, p. 478). In other words, misunderstanding the key zoonym components results in the misunderstanding of the idiomatic expression and, as a result, inadequate translation as well.

There are many idioms with a zoonym component that are used every day in Bosnian and English respectively. Their meanings are instantly deciphered by the natives, partly because of the shared cultural background, and partly because of both frequent and long-term exposure to such phraseological units. However, for non-natives they can easily become a problem in terms of comprehension and translation. Going back to Barker’s (1992; 2018) view on similarities and differences, it is effortless to note how a marginally different interpretation of symbolism and metaphorical, associative meaning of a certain idiom with a zoonym component can lead to mistakes. In particular, when combined with the complete lack of the appropriate equivalent of that particular meaning in the recipient language. For example, while in English you say “*like a sitting duck*” to refer to an easy target, in Bosnian you say “*glineni golub*”, and even though both examples belong to the same frequently used hyponym, that of a bird, the similarity might be a further reason for confusion.

Idiom translation strategies

Finally, as the analysis is related to the employed translation strategies, it is important to note that in terms of translation of idioms, classification differs as well. Most noted approach to analysing employed translation strategies is that of Baker (1992; 2018) which includes the following: a) using an idiom of similar meaning and form (as sly as a fox - lukav kao lisica), b) using an idiom of similar meaning but dissimilar form (night owl - noćna ptica), c) translation by paraphrase (dog eat dog - žestoka konkurencija), and d) translation by omission. This aligns with the Gläser's (1984, p. 124) classification into full equivalence, partial equivalence and zero equivalence. It is expected that the languages with shared influences and general characteristics will include more examples of full equivalence, that is the use of idioms with similar meaning and form. On the other hand, linguistic, cultural, regional and other differences between the languages will result in a number of examples belonging to the zero or null equivalence category.

Methodology

The research corpus has been formed on a basis of lexicographical work *Englesko bosanski rječnik idioma i specifičnih izraza* by Muhamed Pasanbegovic (2002). The dictionary consists of English idioms and idiomatic phrases, and their Bosnian translations and meanings. To the author's knowledge, Pasanbegovic's dictionary is the only English-Bosnian dictionary of idioms. That is yet another testament to the importance of research in this particular area of language.

The dictionary used for the extraction of tokens, for the purpose of quantitative and qualitative analysis, contains various phraseological units including "pure" idioms, similes, proverbs, etc. Therefore, it is important to note that all of the mentioned multi-word units have been recognized and categorized as idioms through various categorization systems, for example similes or proverbs (Makkai, 1972).

All the examples containing a zoonym component were noted and the final result was the list of 82 idioms that were analyzed for the purpose of this research paper. After the list was compiled, all the English idioms were analyzed and compared to their Bosnian counterparts. Three groups were noted. The first group, type 1, included examples of idioms that were the identical translation equivalents, therefore the full equivalence translation strategy was employed. The second group, type 2, contained idioms that used a different zoonym, in other words, idioms employing the partial equivalence translation strategy. Finally, the third group of idioms, type 3, contained no zoonym components within the Bosnian translation equivalent which is an example of zero/null equivalence translation strategy. All the examples were first calculated, and then the ratios, in terms of percentages, were determined as well. After that, further quantitative and qualitative analysis was conducted by determining the frequency of idioms with specific zoonym components to reveal whether the two languages differ in terms of the employed zoonym, and where that was the case, what degree of differences was noted with respect to the noted hypernyms of the employed zoonyms.

Discussion and analysis of the results

The two languages exhibited significant similarities with 27 idioms having identical translation equivalents in the target language accounting for 33% of the total number of idioms. These were identical, well established idioms recognized in both languages such as *wolf in sheep's clothing* as opposed to its translation equivalent *vuk u janjećoj koži*. Since Bosnian and English, as European languages, share certain influences and idioms are frequently culture specific, a number of identical idioms is to be expected. Influences of the English language through language contact and its leading role as the lingua franca cannot be dismissed either.

However, differences between the two cultures, and consequently languages which also belong to two different language families, reflect in 48 idioms having no direct translation equivalent in BCS. This result accounts for 58.5% of the total number of idioms as can be seen from Table 1.

Type of idioms according to the employed translation strategy	Number of idioms containing zoonym component	Ratio
Type 1 – full equivalence	27	33%
Type 2 – partial equivalence	7	8.50%
Type 3 – total paraphrase	48	58.50%
Total	82	100%

Table 1. *Number and ratio of idioms per type*

In other words, more than half of the examples had to be paraphrased when translating to BCS, as the following examples clearly illustrate: *for chicken feed* – *za badava* or *eager beaver* – *vrijedna i uporna osoba*. The lack of the adequate idiomatic counterparts can result in problems with idiom comprehension and translation as some of the English idiomatic expressions might not be recognized as such. For example, “*keep the wolf from the door*” with the meaning of “*to have just enough money to be able to eat and live*” (Cambridge University Press, 2021), can be easily misinterpreted as the zoonym component *wolf* can additionally have other negative connotations in Bosnian, namely that of danger or deceit as can be seen from the following example “*vuk u jagnjećoj koži*”. This example displays how partial similarities between the two languages can cause further confusion as idioms containing zoonyms may possess several connotative meanings and only some of them may correlate between the two languages.

The results also included seven examples of idioms, accounting for 8.5% of the total number of tokens, where partial translation equivalents were noted. An excellent example is the following expression set: *as hungry as a bear* and *gladan kao vuk*, where partial similarity between English and B/C/S can easily influence the translation choice. Interestingly, hypernyms for four of the noted examples were the same and the sole difference between the two languages was in the choice of the hyponym (example *night owl* vs *noćna ptica*). Three examples included zoonyms of different hypernyms (dog vs osa - *let sleeping dogs lie* - *ne dirati u osinje gnijezdo*,

bird vs vrabac - *A bird in hand is worth two in the bush* - *Bolje vrabac u ruci nego golub na grani*, and chicken vs zec - *count one's chickens before they are hatched* - *praviti ražanj a zec u šumi*). It is worth nothing that the four examples of idioms containing zoonym *chicken* were not translated using the same zoonym even though phraseological units containing this particular idiom are otherwise present in B/C/S (for example: *izgledati kao pokisla kokoš*, *biti pileće pameti* etc.).

As it can be seen from Table 2 below, the zoonym *horse* was the most frequent in the group of English idioms with nine examples followed by *birds* (eight examples) and *cats* (eight examples) that were placed second and third, respectively. In the Bosnian group of idioms, *birds* (five examples) and *cats* (four examples) placed first and second, while *horse* and *mouse* were tied for the third position with three examples each. Interestingly, idioms containing the *horse* zoonym were either a complete match (three cases), or required a complete paraphrase (four cases). It is equally important to note that the number of zoonym components was not identical between the two languages, for example, an English idiom *A bird in hand is worth two in the bush* contains one zoonym, but its Bosnian counterpart *Bolje vrabac u ruci nego golub na grani* contains two.

Zoonym	Number of examples		Zoonym	Number of examples
horse	9		ptičica/ptica	5
bird	8		maca	4
cat/kitten/kitty	8		miš	3
dog(s)	7		konj	3
chicken	4		zec	2
worm	4		vuk	2
duck	3		bik	2
wolf	3		zamorče	1
bull/ox	3		vrabac	1
mouse/mice	3		slijepi miš/šišmiš	1
fish	3		puž	1
cock	3		pas	1
goose	2		ovca	1
rat	2		osa	1
lion	2		mrav	1
sheep	2		majmun	1

tick	2		magarac	1
owl	1		lisica	1
crow	1		lav	1
crocodile	1		krokodil	1
camel	1		jarac	1
weasel	1		janje	1
guinea pig	1		golub	1
ferret	1			
fox	1			
mule	1			
flea	1			
butterfly	1			
bat	1			
bee	1			
monkey	1			
beaver	1			
snail	1			
lamb	1			
bear	1			

Table 2. Frequency of the employed zoonym component in the English and Bosnian idiom examples

As Table 2 indicates, there were, as expected, far fewer zoonyms within the Bosnian translation equivalents which is explained through the aforementioned results showcasing the employed translation strategies. While all the English examples contained at least a singular zoonym component, a number of B/C/S examples, 48 to be precise, contained no zoonym component. This result is due to the null equivalence translation strategy being used. Furthermore, while not all of the missing zoonym translation equivalents are fully foreign to B/C/S idiomatic expressions (such as *fly* - *praviti slona od muhe*), they, nevertheless, still had to be translated by a total paraphrase. This yet again indicates how not all of the idiom meanings correlate between the two languages (*No flies on someone* - *ne dangubiti, ne gubiti vrijeme, brzo obaviti posao*). Understandably, those zoonyms that are relatively foreign to B/C/S for a number of reasons, such as *beaver* or *ferret*, did not have their translation equivalents. Therefore, it is

possible to note and confirm that various regional, cultural, or other influences can also lead to the different distribution of zoonym components within a language.

Conclusion

The complexity of phraseological units, and particularly idioms as their subset, has been recognized as a significant point of confusion for non natives. This fact, along with the noted lack of research within this area of study, especially within the B/C/S language, is clearly indicative of the need for further studies of this particular topic. Idioms with a zoonym component, characterized by their metaphorical, associative meanings, are one of the frequent types of idiomatic expression. As such, analysing these particular English idioms in terms of non-native student's understanding and comprehension remains an important task. While this paper constitutes a step in that direction, it also reveals other potential areas of interest.

Therefore, with respect to the research focusing on the employed translation strategies, further research should be carried out to test if and what sort of correlations exist between the idiom types analyzed in the paper and levels of students' understanding. Other idiomatic expressions with different lexical components can be analyzed in a similar manner, or with respect to their characteristics and how those influence their translation and comprehension. Such analyses can ultimately lead to the creation of a more comprehensive bilingual dictionary of idiomatic expressions that is currently needed for the B/C/S language.

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KONTRASTIVNA ANALIZA IDIOMA SA ZONIMSKOM KOMPONENTOM U ENGLESKOM I BOSANSKOM/HRVATSKOM/SRPSKOM

Sažetak

Cilj ovog rada je ponuditi više informacija o načinu prevođenje idioma sa zoonimskom sastavnicom sa engleskog na B/H/S jezik. Analiza uključuje 82 primjera idioma na engleskom koji su preuzeti iz leksikografskog izvora, dvojezičnog rječnika, a potom kategorisani shodno zoonimskim sastavnicama i upotrijebljenim prevodnim strategijama. Rezultati pokazuju da se najčešće upotrebljava strategija nulte ekvivalencije. Drugim riječima, zbog nedostatka potpuno istog ili sličnog primjerka idioma u jeziku primaocu, strategija potpunog parafraziranja idioma sa zoonimskom sastavnicom je najčešće upotrebljena prevodna strategija. Rad također ukazuje potrebu za dodatnim istraživanjem kada se radi o razumijevanju i prevođenju engleskih idioma za govornike B/H/S jezika.

Ključne riječi: idiomi, prevod, zoonimi, ekvivalencija