

**ANIMAL IDIOMS AND THEIR ROMANIAN EQUIVALENTS**  
**EXPRESII CARE AU LA BAZA DENUMIRI DE ANIMALE SI**  
**ECHIVALENTA LOR IN LIMBA ROMANA**

**ANDREEA VARGA, ASTRID GROSZLER**

*\*Agricultural and Veterinary University of the Banat, Timișoara, Romania*

**Abstract:** *This paper revolves around the analysis of animal idioms as both a semantic and a cultural phenomenon, establishing equivalences with the Romanian language and highlighting the possible cultural similarities. Furthermore, the paper will be endorsed by theoretical input on collocation which lies at the basis of idioms and equivalence as a process of translation.*

**Rezumat:** *Această lucrare are ca scop principal analiza expresiilor și proverbelor cu animale atât din punct de vedere semantic, cât și cultural, stabilind echivalențe cu limba română și subliniind posibilele asemănări culturale. De asemenea, lucrarea are ca suport teoretic colocațiile care stau la baza expresiilor și echivalența ca proces de traducere.*

**Key words:** *idioms, collocations, equivalence*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *proverbe, colocații, echivalența*

The purpose of this research paper is to establish semantic and cultural similarities and differences when translating animal idioms from English into Romanian.

Idioms are terms or phrases whose meaning cannot be inferred simply from the meaning of each of its words, but they comprise a figurative significance which is known through common use.

The definition of idioms can be narrowed down to words collocated together which become fossilized and which eventually alter the meaning of the words that exist. Collocations “consist of two or three lexical (sometimes called full, descriptive, substantial) words, usually linked by grammatical (empty, functional, relational) words. The collocates within a collocation define and delimit each other by eliminating at least some of their other possible meaning; the defining may be mutual and equally balanced, but more often it is closer for one to collocate than for the other.”

A collocation can be sundered into syntagmatic or horizontal, thus relying on a common structure, or paradigmatic or vertical, residing in words pertaining to the same semantic field which may function as substitutes for each other or be semantic opposites. These fall within their category and become collocations only when arrayed syntagmatically.

In effect, idioms are colloquial metaphors requiring some foundational cognizance, information or experience, employed within a culture where the interlocutors must have a common reference point. Perforce, they constitute more than just a semantic part of language, but rather a totem of a particular culture. Nonetheless, idioms with a metaphorical meaning can be construed as more universal since animals occur in all cultures as embodiments of particular features.

Another operating concept that bolsters up the thesis of this paper is equivalence. Equivalence, defined under a larger scope, constitutes the result of a

translation process revolving around the identity relation between two terms pertaining to two different languages and possessing almost the same connotation and denotation. Reduced to a more narrow meaning, equivalence is a translation technique which presupposes rendering a term or set phrase in the source language into a different term in the target language, but preserving the correspondence with the same reality. Equivalences are established between texts integrating in a certain culture, in a particular communication context, and which are perceived as consequences of the interaction between the translator and the text. Several types of equivalence can be distinguished: cognitive (engendered by the semantics of the text and the knowledge brought forth by the translator, based on real or unreal experiences), emotional (intuitive), denotative (conveying the information advanced by the source language text), connotative (preserving the style, the language register, the sociolect, the geographical outreach of the expressions), standard or normative (according to the genre of the text for translation, for example, a textbook, an advertisement, etc. ), pragmatic or dynamic ( adapted to the knowledge of the reader in order to be comprehended).

The plethora of animal idioms can be subdued to a manicheistic segregation, embodying either the good or the bad. Herd animals, in general, horses, cattle, are associated with fertility as inheritance from the Celts and, thus, gain positive coordinates. However, they preserve specific features of characteristic behavior which are emphasized and employed at a metaphorical level: as strong as a horse/ox (very strong), back the wrong horse (bet on the wrong horse, by shank's mare, change horses in midstream (to make new plans or choose a new leader in an activity), a dark horse (a candidate who is little known to the general public), eat like a horse (to eat a lot), flog/beat a dead horse (to continue fighting a battle that has been won, get off one`s high horse (to begin to be humble and agreeable), get on one`s high horse (to behave with arrogance), hold one`s horses (to wait, to be patient), hoof it (to walk or run (a hoof is the foot of a horse/sheep/cow etc.)), horse around (to play around in a rough way), a horse of a different color (something totally separate and different), horse sense (common sense, practical thinking), horse trade (to bargain in a hard and skillful way), lock the barn door after the horse is gone (to try to deal with something after it is too late), look a gift horse in the mouth (to complain if a gift is not perfect), on horseback (on the back of a horse), put (someone or something) out to pasture (to retire someone or something, just as you would put a horse that is too old to work out to pasture), put the cart before the horse (to do things in the wrong order), ride herd on (someone) (to watch closely and strictly supervise someone), straight from the horse`s mouth (directly from the person who said something, directly from a dependable source), wild horses could not drag (someone away) (there is nothing that will force someone to go somewhere or do something), work like a horse (to work very hard), you can lead a horse to water (but you can't make it drink) (you can give someone the opportunity to do something but you cannot force him or her to do it if they do not want to), as gentle as a lamb (very gentle), as innocent as a lamb( having no guilt, naïve), as meek as a lamb (quiet, docile, meek), the black sheep of the family( the worst or the most unpopular member of a family, like lambs to the slaughter (quietly

and without complaining about the dangers that may lie ahead), separate the sheep from the goats (to divide people into two groups), a cash cow (profitable business), a sacred cow (a belief or system that is treated with much respect and is not usually criticized) until the cows come home (for a very long time), holy cow (surprise, excitement). On the other hand, bad animals are usually associated with the snake or the wolf: a snake in the grass (a treacherous or underhand person), a snake-pit (any arena where people are viciously fighting each other for power). Serpents symbolize trouble corollary to strife and infertility, whereas wolves, though paragons of loyalty, success, perseverance, stability, thought, intuition, learning, occur in idioms with negative connotations: cry wolf (to give a false alarm, to warn of a danger that is not there), keep the wolf from the door (to maintain oneself at the most basic level), keep the wolves at bay (to fight against some kind of trouble), a lone wolf (someone who prefers to spend time alone and has few friends), throw (someone) to the wolves (to send someone into danger without protection, to sacrifice someone), wolf down (something) (to gulp down something, to eat something quickly), a wolf in sheep's clothing (a person who pretends to be good).

Idioms and collocations can be posited as having a Romanian equivalent and sharing the same common feature of the animate subject. Such eloquent examples are: to hold one's horses which has the Romanian equivalent of a ține caii în frâu and which elicits the power, strength, freedom, wildness of the horse. However, if we are to consider the following idiom: to bet on the wrong horse, it is most obvious why it has no Romanian equivalent. Horse racing is deeply inveterate in English tradition being almost an iconic sport, but not in Romanian culture. The idiom to look a gift horse in the mouth has a perfect equivalent in *calul de darnă u se caută la dinți*, which underscores that horses were an expensive, wealthy gift in both traditions. The lamb is cogently perceived as meek and innocent in both of the aforementioned languages, the idioms having literal translations in the latter language: as gentle as a lamb, preserves its structure based on a simile in Romanian and is translated with *bland ca un mielușel*, like lambs to slaughter is rendered as *ca mielul la tăiere*, the black sheep of the family becomes *oaia neagră a familiei*. Swine are universally tropes of filth, ordure, dung and inferiority: cast pearl before swine- *arunca perle la porci*, as fat as a pig- *gras ca un porc*. Nonetheless, they are associated in the Chinese tradition with being highly intelligent, scholarly, easily angered, easily swayed and affected by emotions. To further continue with my analysis on equivalents, the bull is another universal paragon of wealth, potency, beneficence, generative force, male procreative strength, kingship, taming of the masculine and animal nature. These traits are shed light upon in the following idioms: as strong as a bull- *puternic ca un taur*, and take the bull by the horns with the Romanian pendant *a apuca taurul de carne*. The mouse is subsumed under the same category of universally acknowledged animals for a characteristic feature illustrated in the idiom: as poor as a mouse church, its Romanian counterpart being *sarac ca un șoarece de biserică*, which explains the pervasiveness of the church in all cultures.

On balance, animal idioms may revolve around the same trait of characteristic behavior which is inherent in the animal, they may be attached features eloquent for a

particular geographic space, or they may inherit traits a posteriori as consequence of their social, historical or religious involvement and significance in these events. Idioms enucleate a cornucopia of details in the history of a language explaining for alterations and providing with depictions of certain cultures.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. LUNGU BADEA, G., Dictionary of terms employed in the theory, practice and didactics of translation. **Timisoara: Editura Orizonturi Universitare, 2003**
2. NEWMARK, PETER, Approaches to translation, **Phoenix ELT, 1980**
3. <http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/>