

# Idioms with people's names in English and Croatian

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**Idioms with people's names in English and Croatian**  
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## **Abstract**

This research is a contrastive analysis of phraseological units in English and Croatian which contains names of people. It is based on a corpus which consists of 29 selected PUs from a total of 12 dictionaries. It consists of a brief theoretical overview which explains what phraseology, phraseological units, as well as the crucial characteristics of PUs are. Besides that, it briefly discusses the techniques can be used in translating, as well as the problems which often occur thereby.

The central part of the research is the analysis of the corpus, which consists of the identification of a PU and a paraphrase in the source language – English, and dictionary equivalents in the target language – Croatian. After the analysis, the etymology of an expression is explained in order to show why we use certain people's names in describing different occurrences, as well as the influence of specific cultures on our languages.

The three appendices represent an overview of data found in the dictionaries used for this analysis. Therefore, the first appendix is an overview of all the dictionaries along with the statistics of how frequent these expressions occur in individual dictionaries. The second appendix contains a list of all the PUs used in this research: their version in the source language, their translation, and the method of translation. Finally, the third appendix contains a list of the translating techniques which were used in translating expressions from English into Croatian, as well as information about how many times a certain technique was used in the translation.

*Keywords:* phraseology, phraseological units, people's names, English, Croatian

# Contents

|              |  |           |
|--------------|--|-----------|
| <b>1</b>     | <b>Introduction .....</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>2</b>     | <b>Theoretical background .....</b>                                | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>2.1</b>   | <b>Phraseology and phraseological units.....</b>                   | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>2.2</b>   | <b>The defining characteristics of phraseological units .....</b>  | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>2.2.1</b> | <i>Semantic and syntactic stability and lexicalization .....</i>   | <i>2</i>  |
| <b>2.2.2</b> | <i>Polylexemic structure .....</i>                                 | <i>2</i>  |
| <b>2.2.3</b> | <i>Idiomacity .....</i>  | <i>2</i>  |
| <b>3</b>     | <b>Research design .....</b>                                       | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>3.1</b>   | <b>Common problems with translating phraseological units .....</b> | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>3.2</b>   | <b>Corpus description .....</b>                                    | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>3.2.1</b> | <i>Corpus .....</i>  | <i>3</i>  |
| <b>3.2.2</b> | <i>The translation pattern .....</i>                               | <i>4</i>  |
| <b>4</b>     | <b>Corpus analysis.....</b>  | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>5</b>     | <b>Conclusion .....</b>  | <b>19</b> |
| <b>6</b>     | <b>References .....</b>  | <b>20</b> |

## 1 Introduction

This research deals with a contrastive analysis of phraseological units in English and Croatian which contain names of people. It is based on a collection of selected expressions from a total of 12 dictionaries.

Since it discusses phraseological units, I will begin this research with a brief theoretical overview, in which I will explain the role of phraseology as a discipline of linguistics. Also, I will point out what the main characteristics of phraseological units as the subject of phraseology are.

Secondly, I will indicate and discuss some of the general problems concerning the translation of phraseological units, as well as define the most frequent techniques of translating phraseological units.

Finally, I will provide an in-depth analysis of 29 phraseological units which I selected for the purpose of this research. By this analysis, I will try to clarify and exemplify how translating phraseological units functions and what some of the problems concerning their translation from a source into a target language are. In addition, I will also try to explain the etymology of all the expressions analyzed in this research, in order to show how specific people and different historical events shapes our language.

## 2 Theoretical background

### 2.1 Phraseology and phraseological units

In her coursebook *English Phraseology*, Sabine Fiedler (2007: 15) points out the two senses of the term phraseology. In one sense, it marks the field of study, *i.e.* phraseology research. In another sense, it denotes phraseological units. Phraseological units, or PUs, establish ‘the phrasicon’, which is defined as “the whole inventory of idioms and phrases, both word-like and sentence-like set expressions” (Gläser 1998: 125). Phraseological units have been traditionally referred to as ‘idioms’, but this polysemous term covers numerous kinds of multi-word units (Fiedler 2007: 15). As Gläser also pointed out, “idiom may be regarded as the prototype of the phraseological unit (1984: 123), but it is not synonymous with a phraseological unit.

Therefore, a PU is defined not as an idiom, but as “a lexicalized polylexemic linguistic unit which is characterized, in principle, by semantic and syntactic stability, and to a great extent by idiomaticity” (Fiedler 2007: 28). This definition specifies the fundamental characteristics of

phraseological units, which, for the purpose of a better understanding of PUs, have to be defined as well.

## **2.2 The defining characteristics of phraseological units**

### **2.2.1 *Semantic and syntactic stability and lexicalization***

Since lexicalization is connected to the prospect of semantic stability of PUs, it is necessary to explain that term in the first place.

Semantic and syntactic stability denotes that PUs are “fixed and ready-made unit[s]” (Fiedler 2007: 21), meaning that the combination of words in a PU is not arbitrary, but it follows a certain established sequence of words. However, some idioms are only relatively stable, meaning that some of its constituents can be changed, example of which is *by/in leaps and bounds* (Fiedler 2007: 19).

As such, PUs are lexicalized (*i.e.* incorporated in a certain language) by being “stored in memory as a result of previous exposure to the sequence” (Arnaud, et al., 2008: 112) and “not produced anew as random sequences of words . . . but only reproduced” (Fiedler 2007: 21).

### **2.2.2 *Polylexemic structure***

Polylexicity, as one of the “necessary conditions for inclusion in the phraseological spectrum” (Granger, Paquot 2008: 32), denotes that PUs consist of at least two constituents which have a meaning on their own, as in the idioms ‘Achilles’ heel’, ‘Gordian knot’ or ‘Pandora’s box’, for example. However, Fiedler also points out that there are different opinions on how correct it is to choose this criterion for separating phraseological from non-phraseological items (Fiedler 2007: 18).

### **2.2.3 *Idiomacity***

This term describes the fact that the meaning of a PU is “difficult or even impossible to derive from the meanings of the constituents it is composed of” (Fiedler 2007: 22). For example, the meaning of the expressions ‘and Bob’s your uncle’, or ‘sweet Fanny Adams’ cannot be deduced from the meanings of the words which constitute the expression. However, there is an opacity scale of PUs, meaning that their idiomacity can be graded. Therefore, there are different

subclasses of idioms, which vary from being semantically opaque to semantically transparent (Fiedler 2007: 22).

### 3 Research design

The source of this research were phraseological units in English which contain people's names, while the target was their translation into Croatian.

Before I start with the analysis itself, I would like to point out some of the common problems connected to translating phraseological units and describe the pattern which I will follow in the analysis.

#### 3.1 Common problems with translating phraseological units

Fiedler states that “an otherwise excellent translation . . . fails when confronted with a PU” (2007: 116). The reason for this is that the expression in a target language should “preserv[e] the context and achiev[e] the stylistic quality of the source language text” (Gläser 1984: 124). Because of the characteristics of PUs (*i.e.* their idiomaticity, stability, polylexicity and often figurative meaning), it is sometimes very hard to preserve the original connotation of an expression. Therefore, several translating techniques are applied to phraseological units, as suggested by Gläser (1984: 125), and I will explain only those which occur in this research:

- a) *complete equivalence* – the constituents which constitute an expression are the same in both the source and the target language; e.g. ‘Achilles’ heel’ = ‘*Ahilova peta*’
- b) *partial equivalence* – some of the constituents which constitute an expression are the same in both the source and the target language, and some are different; e.g. ‘grow like Topsy’ = ‘*rasti kao gljive*’
- c) *zero equivalence* – no match between any of the constituents of an expression in the source and the target language; e.g. ‘(and Bob’s your uncle)’ = ‘*i mirna Bosna*’.

#### 3.2 Corpus description

##### 3.2.1 Corpus

This research deals with a contrastive analysis of phraseological units in English, which is its source, and the target of the research is the translation of those phraseological units into Croatian.

The corpus consists of 29 phraseological units which were selected from 12 dictionaries, some of which bilingual, and the rest monolingual (English).

The complete list of the dictionaries used, in alphabetical order, along with the abbreviations used for each dictionary and data about how frequently these expressions occur in individual dictionaries, is provided in the table in Appendix I. Those dictionaries which I used specifically for etymology will not be included in the list.

The complete list of the PUs used in this research in English, along with their translations in Croatian and the method of translation can be found in Appendix II.

### 3.2.2 *The translation pattern*

The analysis is based on the pattern suggested by Fiedler (2007: 120):

- 1) identification of the PU in the source language
- 2) analysis of the phraseological meaning (SL paraphrase)
- 3) translation of the phraseological meaning (TL paraphrase)
- 4) substitution by a PU in the target language

In addition, I will state the translating technique used for a particular PU (under 5), and, if necessary, comment on any possible mistakes or inadequacies in the translation, as well as list other possible translations as suggested by the dictionaries. After the analysis of every idiom there will be a section which provides information about the PU's origin. In Appendix III, I will also provide an overview of translating techniques used in the target language.

## 4 Corpus analysis

### (1) *Achilles' heel*

- 1) Chances are that one out of 20 bottles of wine will be bad only because of an inadequate cork. Simply put, bark cork is the *Achilles' heel* of the wine industry (EHFR 103)
- 2) a weak point or fault in someone or something otherwise perfect or excellent (DoAI 4)
- 3) *slaba strana čega; slabost* (EHFR 103); *ranjivo mjesto* <čije>; *slaba strana* <čija> (CEDoI 577)
- 4) *Ahilova peta* (EHFR 103);
- 5) complete equivalence

This expression originated in Greek mythology, *i.e.* in Homer's *Iliad*. Thetis held her young son Achilles by the heel while dipping him into the river Styx to make him invulnerable, his heel



was his only weakness and he was killed by Paris during the Trojan War by an arrow which pierced his heel (DoI 2).

In Croatian, it is also possible to translate it as ‘*bolna točka*’ (EHFR 103).

## **(2) before you can (could) say Jack Robinson**

- 1) We opened another bottle of wine and *before you could say Jack Robinson* it was empty. (EHFR 170)
- 2) (*old-fashioned*) very quickly or suddenly (OID 338)
- 3) *vrlo brzo; smjesta* (EHFR 170), *brzo; odmah; u najkraće vrijeme; u najkraćem <mogućem> roku; velikom brzinom* (CEDoI 315-316); *začas; u hipu* (CEDoI 157)
- 4) *dok kažeš britva; dok si rekao keks* (EHFR 170);
- 5) partial equivalence

There are several explanations of the origin of this phrase, and none of them are verified. TAHDol suggests that it originated in 1700s and, according to Grose’s *Classical Dictionary*, Jack Robinson “was a man who paid such brief visits to acquaintances that there was scarcely time to announce his arrival before he had departed” (TAHDol 85), while DoI states that the phrase could also originate from Thomas Hudson’s poem *Jack Robinson* (DoI 104).

In Croatian, it can be translated as ‘*u tren oka*’ (EFR 117); ‘*dok udariš (bi udario) dlanom o dlan*’ (CEDoI 157); ‘*dok okom trepneš*’; ‘*dok si dlanom o dlan*’ (HEFR 33).

## **(3) (and) Bob’s your uncle**

- 1) Simply empty the contents of the bag into a cup of hot water, stir gently, *and Bob’s your uncle*. You’ll have a cup of nourishing soup. (EHFR 22)
- 2) that solves the problem (MS 66); (*BrE informal*) often used after explaining how to do sth, solve a problem, etc. to emphasize how easy it is (OID 35)
- 3) *i s tim je posao završen* (EHFR 22); *i time je posao završen* (HEFR 23)
- 4) *i gotova stvar; i to je to; i mirna Bosna; i mirna Bačka* (EHFR 22);
- 5) zero equivalence

This phrase probably dates back to 1887 and the Prime Minister Robert Cecil, who unexpectedly decided to give an important government position to his nephew, who was not considered a very important politician. This interpretation is suggested both by OID (35) and DoI (159).

Other suggested translations in Croatian are: ‘*i gotova priča*’ (HEFR 194); ‘*i sve u redu*’; ‘*<i> tu prestaje svaka diskusija*’; ‘*<i> stvar je završena*’ (CEDoI 83).

#### (4) a doubting Thomas

- 1) Council member Doug Christensen expressed the most skepticism. 'I'm *a doubting Thomas*,' he said. (CEDoI 795)
- 2) someone who will not easily believe something without strong proof or evidence. (Can be said of a man or a woman.) (DoAI 167)
- 3) *sumnjičav čovjek; čovjek koji nikomu ne vjeruje* (CEDoI 795)
- 4) *nevjerni Toma* (CEDoI 795)
- 5) partial equivalence

This expression comes from the Bible. Jesus' disciple Thomas started believing in the resurrection of Jesus only after he had seen him and touched his wounds (OID 95).

#### (5) (as) drunk as David's sow

- 1) She was notorious for her drinking habits. She was always as drunk as *David's sow*. (CEDoI 760)
- 2) very drunk
- 3) *jako pijan*
- 4) *pijan kao svinja* ([vulgar] *guzica*) (CEDoI 760)
- 5) partial equivalence

According to Francis Grose's dictionary *1811 Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, this phrase came into existence when a David Lloyd, who had a sow with six legs and a drunk wife. After drinking too much, she went to drink herself sober into the sow's sty. When David presented the sow to a company who came to see it, they only saw his drunk wife, after which the woman was called 'David's sow'.

#### (6) every man jack of us

- 1) *Every man jack of us knows* all word and no play is a bore. (CEDoI 291)
- 2) each and every one; every last one; every single one; every individual in a group (TAHDoI 295)
- 3) *svi <bez izuzetka>, apsolutno svi* (CEDoI 291)
- 4) *svi do jednoga* (CEDoI 291)
- 5) partial equivalence

TAHDoI (295) suggests that this idiom has been in use since 1800s, and *Online Etymology Dictionary* claims that the proper name 'Jack' was used as early as in the 14<sup>th</sup> century to denote

any common man. OED also provides some similar expressions, such as ‘man jack’, ‘man John’, ‘man Johnatan’, and any man Jack.

### (7) every/any Tom, Dick, and Harry

- 1) Mary’s sending out very few invitations. She doesn’t want *every Tom, Dick, and Harry turning up*. / The golf club is very exclusive. They don’t let *any Tom, Dick, or Harry* join. (DoAI 192)
- 2) everyone, without discrimination; ordinary people (DoAI 192)
- 3) *baš svatko; bilo tko* (EHFR 205); *svi; svatko* (EFR 69); *svi odreda (bez izuzetka)* (CEDoI 910); *bilo tko, ne samo oni privilegirani* (HEFR 254)
- 4) *svaka šuš*a (EHFR 205); *cijeli (čitav, sav) svijet* (CEDoI 756)
- 5) partial equivalence

Different versions of this phrase has been in use ever since Shakespearean time, according to DoI while the version as we know it can be traced back to at least 1815 ((DoI 104). According to TAHD<sub>oI</sub> (311), the first use of a similar variant is recorded in 1583, and Shakespeare used a similar phrase – ‘Tom, Dick, and Francis’ – in his play *Henry IV, part I*.

The Croatian partial equivalent ‘*svaka šuš*a’ has a pejorative meaning, because ‘*šuš*a’ means ‘an insignificant person’ (HJP), and is therefore used for ‘any Tom, Dick, and Harry’, which also can have a negative meaning in context. The other equivalent – ‘*cijeli (čitav, sav) svijet*’ – is used to denote ‘everybody’.

### (8) for Pete’s sake

- 1) *For Pete’s sake*, what are you doing in that bathroom? You’ve been in there for nearly an hour. (OID 168)
- 2) used to emphasize that it is important to do sth, or when you are annoyed or impatient about sth (OID 168); a mild exclamation of surprise or shock (DoAI 226)
- 3) *izražavanje čuđenja, zgražanja, usrdne molbe itd.* (CEDoI 78)
- 4) *za ime Božje; tako ti Boga* (CEDoI 78)
- 5) partial equivalence

TAHD<sub>oI</sub> suggests that the name ‘Pete’ in this expression is a euphemism for God, and it also provides synonymous expressions such as ‘for the love of Pete’, ‘for the love of Mike’, ‘for the love of God’, ‘for goodness’, ‘for heaven’s sake’, ‘for pity’s sake’ (TAHD<sub>oI</sub> 362). In addition to those variants, McGraw-Hill’s DoAI lists the expression ‘for gosh sake’, as well (DoAI 226).

Another version of this idiom is listed in HEFR – ‘for Christ’s (goodness)’ – which is translated in the same way (CEDoI 64).

That being so, ‘*za ime Božje*’ and ‘*tako ti Boga*’ could be regarded as partial equivalents. Other possible translations are: ‘*budi tako dobar, molim te*’; ‘*ako Boga znaš*’ (CEDoI 78), depending on the context.

### **(9) a Freudian slip**

- 1) *Freudian slips* can tell you a lot about a person’s deep motives, attitudes and preferences, like when instead of “my ex wife” he said “my sex wife”. (EHFR 186)
- 2) a mistake in speaking or writing which shows what you really think or feel about sb/sth (OID 140)
- 3) *govorna omaška koja prema Freudu nije slučajna, već je rezultat podsvijesti* (EHFR 186)
- 4) *Freudova omaška* (HEFR 164);
- 5) complete equivalence

This expression is named after Sigmund Freud’s concept in his work *The Psychopathology of Everyday life*, which he wrote in 1901. In his psychoanalytic theory, Freud defined and described various types of verbal mistakes which are, according to him, errors revealing unconscious thought, beliefs, or wishes. (Reason 610). Its use is very broad – the expression is applied to statements or behavior of not only of people, but even towns, companies, nations, and it describes any unintended or embarrassing accident (DoA 211).

There are other expressions in Croatians which denote ‘a Freudian slip’, and they are zero equivalents: ‘*govor podsvijesti*’ (EHFR 186); ‘*pobjegne ti jezik*’ (HEFR 73).

### **(10) a Gordian knot/cut the Gordian knot**

- 1) There was so much fighting between the staff, she decided to *cut the Gordian knot* and sack them all. (EHFR 118)
- 2) solve a very difficult or complicated problem with forceful action (OID 152)
- 3) *složen problem; odlučnom akcijom riješiti kompliciran problem* (EHFR 118); *riješiti težak problem; razriješiti zamršenu (kompliciranu) situaciju na najjednostavniji način* (CEDoI 129)
- 4) *gordijski čvor; presjeći gordijski čvor* (EHFR 118)
- 5) complete equivalence

This expression originated from a legend about King Gordius and Alexander the Great. Gordius tied a very complicated knot and said that whoever untied it would become the ruler of Asia. Alexander the Great came and cut the knot with his sword (OID 152). In addition, DoI (157) claims that the phrase has been used in English since Shakespeare, who used it in his play *Henry V*.

Another expression in Croatian can be used to translate this PU, '*zamršeno klupko*' (EHFR 118), which denotes any complicated problem, and is therefore a zero equivalent.

**(11) grow like Topsy**

- 1) The estimated losses in Asia continued to *grow like Topsy*. (CEDoI 241)
- 2) grow very fast, particularly in an unplanned or uncontrolled way (OID 156)
- 3) *pojavljivati se u velikom broju; naglo se množiti (širiti)* (CEDoI 241)
- 4) *niču (rastu) kao gljive <poslije kiše>* (CEDoI 241)
- 5) partial equivalence

The author of this expression is Harriet Beecher Stowe, who invented it in her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, as stated in OID (156). Topsy was a little slave girl in the novel. When she was asked about her family, Topsy denied that she was ever even born DoI (191-192).

Another version of this idiom – 'grow like mushrooms' – is mentioned in HEFR (241).

**(12) if Mohammed will not go to the mountain, the mountain must go to Mohammed**

- 1) They never visit me, so the only way for me to see my grandchildren is to go and visit them. *If Mohammed will not go to the mountain, the mountain must come to Mohammed*. (EHFR 138)
- 2) if a person cannot or refuses to come and see you, you must go and see them (OID 251); if things do not change the way you want them to, you must adjust to the way they are (DoAI 324); on recognizing that one has insufficient power to effect one's most desired solution, one decides to make do with the next best alternative (MS 179)
- 3) *treba poduzeti inicijativu ako je onaj od kojeg se očekuje, ne pokazuje* (EHFR 138)
- 4) *ako neće Muhamed brijegu, mora brijeg Muhamedu* (EFHR 138)
- 5) complete equivalence

According to *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms*, this saying has been in use since late 1500s, while its source is a tale about the prophet Muhammad. At one occasion, Muhammad wanted to prove his teachings by ordering a mountain to move, and when the

mountain didn't move, he ascribed it to the merciful God, who didn't want to kill them by moving the mountain. There are several versions of this expression based on different variants of Muhammad's name, so instead of 'Mohammed', the name 'Mahomet' (DoAI 324; MS 179), or 'Muhammad' (TAHDoI 513) can be used. I would also like to point out that, when it comes to the Croatian equivalent, the word '*brdo*' is used more often than the word '*brijeg*', which is suggested in EHFR.

**(13) a Jack of all trades (and/but master of none)**

- 1) Basically, I'm *a jack of all trades*. I can turn my hand to anything. So, if you want something done, just come to me. (EHFR 114)
- 2) someone who can do several different jobs instead of specializing in one (DoAI 360); a person who knows a little about a lot of different subjects or activities, but not a lot about any one of them (ITL 48); a person who can do many different kinds of work, but perhaps does not do them very well (OID 194)
- 3) *osoba vična mnogim poslovima; tobožnji majstor; tobožnji znalac* (EHFR 114)
- 4) *majstor svih zanata; majstor kvariš; sveznalica-neznalica* (EHFR 114)
- 5) zero equivalence

The full version of this expression is 'a Jack of all trades and/but master of none'. Similarly to 'before you can say Jack Robinson', the 'Jack' part is based on the concept that 'Jack' is an average, common man. However, the complete expression bears a different connotation, meaning that it is used in a derogatory way. It seems that 'Jack of all trades' was first used in 1612 by Geffray Minshull in his *Essays and characters of a prison and prisoners*, while 'the master of none' was added in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (*The Phrase Finder*). Croatian translation of the full expression, as suggested by Bendow in EHFR (114), is '*tko u sve prti, ništa ne napravi kako treba*'. In HEFR (314), it is also related to the expression '*Katica (djevojka) za sve*'.

**(14) Johnny-come-lately**

- 1) These men and who had devoted their lives to the Democratic Party were not eager to welcome a *Joannie-come-lately* like Hillary Clinton.
- 2) someone who joins in (something) after it is under way (EID 95): a newcomer (ITL 48);
- 3) *novajlija* (EHFR 115)
- 4) *zakašnjeli pridošlica* (EHFR 115)
- 5) zero equivalence

The proper name Johnny has been used in a contemptuous and humorous sense ever since 1670s (for example, in the American Civil War, John(ny) was the typical name in the North; in 1800s, it was a typical name for an Englishman; in the Crimean War, it became the typical name for a Turk and Arab). The phrase Johnny-come-lately was first attested in 1839 (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). In EHFR (115), the expression ‘Joannie-come-lately’ was used in the example sentence, but the author pointed out that it is a journalist’s construct and that ‘Johnny-come-lately’ is used when referring to both men or women.

**(15) keep up with the Joneses**

- 1) If you want to *keep up with the Joneses* in this neighbourhood, you will have to own at least three cars. (HEFR 105)
- 2) try to have all the possessions and social achievements that your neighbours or other people around you have, especially by buying what they buy (OID 297)
- 3) *napredovati istom brzinom, ne zaostajati* (HEFR 105)
- 4) *držati korak s kim, s čim* (HEFR 105)
- 5) partial equivalence

TAHDoI (580) claims that the expression was coined in 1913 by Arthur R. Momand, a cartoonist who used it for the title of a series in the New York Globe. The last name Jones was probably chosen because it is a very common family name, as OID suggests (197).

**(16) let George do it**

- 1) I am sick and tired of the “*let George do it*” attitude of some parents. They always want to let someone else take the responsibility for the care and welfare of their children. (HEFR 32)
- 2) let someone else do it: it doesn’t matter who (DoAI 397)
- 3) *prebacivanje odgovornosti* (HEFR 32)
- 4) *prebaciti lopticu; svaliti što na čija leđa* (HEFR 32)
- 5) zero equivalence

The origin of this phrase is at least uncertain. Different sources suggest different coinage of the phrase. Therefore, H. L. Mencken, in his work *The American Language* from 1919, states that this phrase originated in France in the 15<sup>th</sup> century: the original expression was ‘Laissez faire à Georges’, and it related to the numerous activities of Cardinal Cardinal Georges d'Amboise, who was Louis XII’s prime minister. Afterwards, it was translated and adopted into English (Mencken, n. pag.). On the other hand, Wolfgang Mieder claims that these two phrases have nothing in

common when it comes to their origin, and that the George in ‘let George do it’ refers to the generic name given to African American slaves on the Pullman Railroad cars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Mieder 17).

HEFR also suggested that this expression could be translated as ‘*brigo moja prijedi na drugoga*’ (HEFR 32). This translation does not seem completely appropriate in this sense because it is usually used as a figurative exclamation when you wish all your problems would be someone else’s problems, while the English expression means that you leave something to be done by someone else. Therefore, the appropriateness of the Croatian paraphrase ‘*prebacivanje odgovornosti*’ is questionable as well. ‘*Prebaciti lopticu*’ seems to be a better variant when it comes to translating this PU.

**(17) live/lead the life of Riley/Reilly**

- 1) Speaking of social injustice, while some have barely enough to eat others *live the life of Riley*. (HEFR 153)
- 2) to live in luxury (DoAI 391); the good life; a comfortable life (ITL 54)
- 3) *živjeti u blagostanju (izobilju): uživati u bogatstvu; bogato živjeti* (CEDoI 92) *živjeti otmjeno, raskošno i lagodno* (EHFR 124);
- 4) *živjeti kao car (kralj)* (CEDoI 97)
- 5) partial equivalence

According to *The Phrase Finder*, this expression originated in the Irish/American community of the USA in 1911 and was first recorded in the Connecticut newspaper called *The Hartford Courant*. However, nobody knows who ‘Riley’, ‘Reilly’, or ‘Reiley’ refers to, which is stated both by *The Phrase Finder* and DoAI (391). This is probably the case of a generic term for Irishmen, similarly to the name Paddy, which is used today (*The Phrase Finder*). I would also like to point out that this expression in Croatian dictionaries is, in almost all cases, translated with suitable Croatian idioms, except once in EHFR (70), where it is mentioned in relation to the idiom ‘live off the fat of the land’ and translated as ‘*živjeti na tuđi račun*’ or ‘*živjeti od tuđih prihoda*’. While these expressions share some similarity, their connotations are different, which is why I don’t think this translation is appropriate.

There are several other expressions in Croatian which have this meaning, some of which are: ‘*živjeti kao bubreg u loju*’ (CEDoI 92); ‘*živjeti kao mali bog*’ (CEDoI 79); ‘*živjeti u svili i kadifi*’ (CEDoI 759); ‘*plivati u slasti i masti*’ (EHFR 121); ‘*živjeti na visokoj nozi*’ (HEFR 153).



**(18) (be a) nosey Parker/parker**

- 1) He's a *nosey parker*. You can trust him to know all the gossip in town. (EHFR 152)
- 2) (*BrE, informal, becoming old-fashioned*) a person who is too interested in other people's private lives (OID 264)
- 3) *njuškalo; radoznalac* (EHFR 152)
- 4) *tko zabada nos* (EHFR 152)
- 5) partial equivalence

The origin of this expression is pretty much uncertain, but there is an interesting story which is connected to its coinage, mentioned in DoI (105) and on *The Phrase Finder*. According to these sources, the expression could be linked to the Archbishop of Canterbury Matthew Parker, who ordered several inquiries during his service from 1559 to 1575. What is more, he had a prominent nose, which is why this story is linked to the phrase itself. However, the story has little credibility (*The Phrase Finder*). The first use of the phrase in print dates back to 1890, when the Victorian novelist Mary Elizabeth Braddon used it in the *Belgravia Magazine* (*The Phrase Finder*).

**(19) (as) old as Methuselah**

- 1) The story is *old as Methuselah*, but those with short attention spans will remember it from *Some Kind of Wonderful* and *The Wonder Years*. (CEDoI 52)
- 2) very old (DoAI 464)
- 3) *jako (vrlo) star* (CEDoI 52)
- 4) *star kao Metuzalem* (CEDoI 452);
- 5) complete equivalence

As stated by McGraw-Hill's *Dictionary of American Idioms* (p.464), this expression refers to Methuselah, who was a biblical figure. Methuselah was a Hebrew patriarch who supposedly lived to be 969 years old. This story was recorded in 1535, in *Miles Coverdale's Bible*. The phrase itself has been in use at least since the 14<sup>th</sup> century and can be found in F. J. Furnvall's *Minor Poems*, which dates back to approximately 1390 (*The Phrase Finder*).

Another idiom of the same origin – '(as) old as Adam (and Eve)' (CEDoI 53) – is synonymous with that expression (CEDoI 53), as well as another expression in Croatian – '*star kao Biblija*' (CEDoI 52).

**(20) (open a) Pandora's box**

- 1) The US ambassador to Baghdad conceded yesterday that the Iraq invasion had *opened a Pandora's Box* of sectarian conflicts which could lead to a regional war.
- 2) a source of great trouble and suffering, although this may not be obvious at the beginning (OID 279)
- 3) *mnogo neočekivanih problema* (EHFR 25); *skrivena nevolja koje mogu naglo izbiti na površinu* (CEDoI 393)
- 4) *otvoriti Pandorinu kutiju* (EHFR 25)
- 5) complete equivalence

This phrase has its origin in Greek mythology, from a myth about Pandora, the first woman created by gods. Zeus wanted to punish the titan Prometheus for giving fire to humans, and ordered other gods to create Pandora. She was sent to Prometheus' brother, carrying a jar which contained all the evils of mankind. She was told not to open the box, but she could not resist her curiosity. She opened the jar and unleashed all the evils, while only hope remained inside (DoA 399-400).

**(21) the patience of Job**

- 1) You need *the patience of Job* to deal with customers like that. (OID 284)
- 2) very great patience (OID 284)
- 3) *krajnje strpljenje; velika strpljivost* (EFR 167)
- 4) *(biti) strpljiv kao Job* (Menac-Mihalić 366)
- 5) complete equivalence

Job was a biblical figure, a hero of the Old Testament book of Job. He was a wealthy man whose faith was tested by God – his wealth disappeared, his children died, he got boils on his skin, but he remained faithful to God and was rewarded eventually (DoA 297).

Although this expression has a complete equivalent, it was not listed in EFR, which translated it by the paraphrases '*krajnje strpljenje*' and '*velika strpljivost*' (EFR 167).

**(22) a Pyrrhic victory**

- 1) It was *a Pyrrhic victory* for the warship captain because, just after he had sunk the Japanese submarine, his own ship caught a torpedo and sank. (HEFR 182)
- 2) a victory which is achieved at too high a price and therefore not worth having (OID 311)

- 3) *pobjeda uz prevelike žrtve i odricanja* (HEFR 182); *pobjeda koja se ne smatra uspjehom; pobjeda koja gubi svrhu zbog pretjeranih žrtava; pobjeda koja ne donosi radost; lažna (besmislena) pobjeda* (CEDoI 589)
- 4) *Pirova pobjeda* (HEFR 182)
- 5) complete equivalence

A Pyrrhic victory, that is a hollow victory, won at too high a price, refers to the victory of the King Pyrrhus of Epirus in the battle at Asculum. In 279 BC, he won that battle, but in the process he lost many men, along with all of his best officers. Afterwards, his words were: “One more such victory and we are lost.” (DoI 157).

### (23) **raise Cain**

- 1) The plan to build a dam met with fierce opposition from the local residents who *raised Cain* about it. (EHFR 31)
- 2) to make a trouble (DoAI 543); to cause a disturbance, often because one is extremely angry (ITL 74)
- 3) *oštro protestirati* (EHFR 31); *žestoko se usprotiviti čemu; protestirati* (EHFR 104); *žestoko se pobuniti; uzbuniti javnost* (EHFR 191)
- 4) *dići frku* (EHFR 191);
- 5) partial equivalence

The idiom ‘raise Cain’ is based on the story from the Bible (Genesis) and the Qur’an. Cain and Abel were the two sons of Adam and Eve. They both brought offerings to God, but only Abel’s offerings were accepted. Because of that, Cain was furious, and he killed his brother Abel in rage. Therefore, he became the first murderer in the Bible (*The Phrase Finder*). According to TAHDol (864), the first written record of the expression comes from 1840, when it was used in the *St. Louis Daily Pennant*.

Other possible translations suggested by EHFR are: ‘*dići kuku i motiku*’; ‘*dići galamu do neba*’ (EHFR 31); ‘*dići galamu oko čega*’ (EHFR 104).

### (24) **the real McCoy**

- 1) When it comes to paintings, I don’t buy reproductions. I want *the real McCoy*. (EHFR 133)
- 2) the authentic, genuine article; the real thing (DoI 126)
- 3) *nešto izvorno; nepatvoreno* (EHFR 133); *nešto poželjno; što ispunjava sva očekivanja* (HEFR 241); *ono što je izvrsno (odlične kvalitete)* (CEDoI 742)

4) *prava stvar* (EHFR 133)

5) partial equivalence

There are several different explanations of the origin of the expression ‘the Real McCoy’. One of them is related to Kid McCoy, an American boxer who lived from in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. One time, he was provoked by a drunk who did not believe he was the lightweight champion. After Kid McCoy lost his patience, he knocked the man out. When the man came round he said to him ‘You’re the real McCoy.’ Another theory is that this expression is related to Bill McCoy, an American who smuggled liquor during the Prohibition, whose alcohol was ‘the Real McCoy’ because it was genuine, and not a substitute.

There are also two explanations from Scotland, as well. The first one relates this expression to a man named Mackay, who lived in the 1800s and named his whisky ‘the real Mackay’ in order to distinguish it from another whisky which had the same name. The second explanation is a story about the family feud between two branches of the Mackay family, who were fighting over which one was the senior, that is ‘the real’ Mackay (DoI 127).

When referring to humans, this expression is translated in Croatian as ‘*čovjek kakvog samo poželjeti možeš*’ or ‘*idealan čovjek*’ (EHFR 133).

## **(25) rob Peter to pay Paul**

- 1) Trying to fill the budget gap by imposing higher taxes on poorly performing businesses is like *robbing Peter to pay Paul*. (EHFR 154)
- 2) to take or borrow from one in order to give or pay something owed to another (DoAI 566)
- 3) *financijske transakcije bez stvarnog dobitka* (EHFR 154)
- 4) *prelijevanje iz šupljeg u prazno* (EHFR 154)
- 5) zero equivalence

The origin of this phrase, according to DoI (p.155), dates all the way back to 1540, when the Church of St. Peter at Westminster became a cathedral. Its privilege was withdrawn ten years after because St. Paul’s cathedral fell under the jurisdiction of the bishop once again. Furthermore, in order to finance repairing of the St. Paul’s cathedral, revenue from St. Peter’s cathedral was used. However, this story loses its credibility because there are earlier versions of this expression (for example, Herbert of Bosham used a similar phrase in 1170s, and John Wyclif in 1380), which is why the exact origin of the phrase remains uncertain.

The Croatian translation of this phrase is dubious because ‘*prelijevanje iz šupljeg u prazno*’ usually means ‘doing something useless’ (HJP). While the English expression could have such connotations, it was not mentioned in any of the dictionaries which I used for this research.

**(26) a smart alec/aleck**

- 1) Thank you for your advice, but I don’t need *a smart alec* like you to tell me what to do. (EHFR 5)
- 2) (*informal, disapproving*) a person who tries to show that they are cleverer than everyone else
- 3) *pametnjaković usijane glave; tko za sebe misli da je najpametniji* (EHFR 5); *praviti se pametan; pametovati; razmetati se svojom pameću* (CEDoI 562)
- 4) *misлити da si popio svu pamet ovog svijeta* (EHFR 38)
- 5) partial equivalence

Although some dictionaries, such as TAHD oI (965) claim that the identity of ‘Alec’ has been lost, *The Phrase Finder* suggests that it could be related to the notorious pimp Alec Hoag, who operated in New York during the 1840s. His most famous trick was called ‘The Panel Game’ – he would sneak in through the gaps in the walls and steal from people who were either asleep or unwary. He was nicknamed Smart Alec because he could not be caught (*The Phrase Finder*). The connection between this idiom and Alec Hoag is suggested by *Online Etymology Dictionary*, as well.

Another possible partial equivalent in Croatian is ‘*prosipati (prodavati) pamet*’ (CEDoI 562).

**(27) sweet Fanny Adams/sweet FA/get sweet Fanny Adams**

- 1) ‘What happened when I was away?’ ‘*Sweet FA.*’ (OID 393)
- 2) nothing; nothing important (OID 393)
- 3) *Br. (baš) ništa* (EFR 235); *ne dobiti ništa; ostati bez očekivanih rezultata* (CEDoI 775)
- 4) *dobiti šipak (brus, <frišku> figu)* (CEDoI 775)
- 5) partial equivalence

The expression ‘sweet Fanny Adams’ is related to the eight-year-old Fanny Adams who was brutally murdered in England in 1867. Everybody was familiar with her name after her murder, and sailors in the British Royal Navy used the expression to refer to the meat they were served in the navy. This usage is recorded in *A dictionary of slang jargon and cant* from 1889 by Barrère and Leland. Afterwards, the phrase started to mean ‘nothing’, because it was used euphemistically for the expression ‘f\*\*\* all’. Walter Downing, who wrote a glossary of soldiers’

slang (*Digger Dialects*) in 1919 was the first to point out the relation between the two expressions (*The Phrase Finder*).

The translation in Croatian, '*dobiti šipak (brus, <frišku> figu*)', works only for 'get sweet Fanny Adams', but for 'sweet Fanny Adams', there are no equivalents that I could find.

**(28) a Sisyphean task**

- 1) Energy conservation is an important concept, but re-educating consumers, getting them to save electricity is *a Sisyphean task*. (HEFR 187)
- 2) a burden or labour that never ends (DoA 501)
- 3) *uzaludan rad (posao); mukotrpan posao koji ne dovodi do rezultata* (CEDoI 597); *bezizgledan posao* (HEFR 187)
- 4) *Sizifov posao* (CEDoI 597)
- 5) complete equivalence

'A Sisyphean task' is yet another expression which owes its existence to Greek mythology. Sisyphus was a king (of Ephyra) who was condemned to roll a heavy rock up a hill in Hades for all eternity, and the rock would roll down again each time (DoA 501).

**(29) the sword of Damocles**

- 1) For the first time under the Howard Government, average earners will no longer have the 47c tax rate hanging over them *like the sword of Damocles*, just one pay rise away from being treated as rich by the tax scales. (CEDoI 432)
- 2) a bad or unpleasant thing that might happen to you at any time and that makes you feel worried or frightened (OID 394)
- 3) *stalna prijetnja* (EHFR 195); *neposredna opasnost* (HEFR 131)
- 4) *Damoklov mač* (EHFR 195);
- 5) complete equivalence

The origin of this expression dates back to ancient times and the works of Horace and Persius, among others. It was also referred to in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in English literature, but it gained more attention in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This legend tells the story of Damocles, a servile courtier of Dionysius, a king who ruled Syracuse around 400 BC. All the time, Damocles would praise the king's happiness, power, and wealth. In order to illustrate how insecure rulers feel, Dionysius invited Damocles to a feast, but he also placed a sword above Damocles' head, which horrified Damocles when he eventually spotted it. Therefore, this sword became a symbol of anything that threatens you constantly (DoI 183).

In Croatian, there is also a partial equivalent: '*visi mač nad glavom komu*' (CEDoI 433).

## 5 Conclusion

In this contrastive analysis of phraseological units in English and Croatian which contain names of people as their constituents, we can see that most of them are translated by providing either partial equivalents or complete equivalents. Only on rare occasion is it the case that there the translations are completely different, *i.e.* that zero equivalents are provided. However, even though there are, in most cases, partial equivalents in Croatian for expressions in English, many of them also lack the complete equivalent in the target language. The reason for that is, as the analysis of each PU's etymology exhibits, that most of the phraseological units in English which I came across in these dictionaries are strongly connected to different cultural aspects. Since many of expressions with people's names in English are related to English or American historical events and specific people of English or American origin, it is reasonable that there are no identical expressions in Croatian, as the essence of an expression and its connotation would be lost if they were translated literally. In those cases, therefore, translators use the expression whose meaning is closest to the original.

On the other hand, when it comes to expressions which originated in mythology, for example Greek or Christian, there are almost always identical equivalents in both English and Croatian. The reason for that is also cultural – the enormous influence of ancient Greek culture and Christianity on all civilizations in general made it possible for these expressions to be translated literally without losing the core of their original meaning.

This analysis shows that translation of PUs is problematic when there are no complete or partial equivalents because its meaning can be altered, and it also emphasizes the importance of etymology as a tool for a better understanding of how certain expressions came to be, why we use certain people's names in describing different phenomena, and how, by knowing the origin of an expression, we can expand the general knowledge of culture and its influence on languages in general.

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## Appendices

Appendix I: The list of the dictionaries used and the frequency of selected expressions

| <b>Dictionary</b>  | <b>Abbreviation</b> | <b>Number of PUs</b> |
|--|---------------------|----------------------|
| Dictionary of Idioms and their Origins   | DoI                 | 13                   |
| Engleski frazeološki rječnik   | EFR                 | 4                    |
| Englesko-hrvatski frazeološki rječnik  | EHFR                | 19                   |
| Hrvatsko-engleski frazeološki rječnik  | HEFR                | 16                   |
| Hrvatsko-engleski frazeološki rječnik + kazalo engleskih i hrvatskih frazema. Croatian-English Dictionary of Idioms + index of English and Croatian Idioms | CEDoI               | 20                   |
| In the Loop: A Reference Guide to American English Idioms  | ITL                 | 10                   |
| McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs  | DoAI                | 16                   |
| Metaphorically Speaking: A Dictionary of 3,800 Picturesque Idiomatic Expressions   | MS                  | 16                   |
| NTC's English Idioms Dictionary  | EID                 | 7                    |
| Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Allusions  | DoA                 | 8                    |
| Oxford Idioms Dictionary for learners of English   | OID                 | 23                   |
| The American Heritage® Dictionary of Idioms  | TAHDoI              | 18                   |

## Appendix II: The complete list of PUs used in the research

| PU in English   | Croatian translation                                      | Translation Technique |
|---|---|-----------------------|
| Achilles' heel  | Ahilova peta  | complete equivalence  |
| before you can (could) say Jack Robinson                                  | dok kažeš britva; dok si rekao keks                       | partial equivalence   |
| (and) Bob's your uncle  | i gotova stvar; i to je to; i mirna Bosna; i mirna Bačka  | zero equivalence      |
| a doubting Thomas   | nevjerni Toma   | partial equivalence   |
| (as) drunk as David's sow   | pijan kao svinja (guzica)                                 | partial equivalence   |
| every man jack of us  | svi do jednoga  | partial equivalence   |
| every/any Tom, Dick, and Harry  | svaka šuša; cijeli (čitav, sav) svijet                    | partial equivalence   |
| for Pete's sake   | za ime Božje; tako ti Boga                                | partial equivalence   |
| a Freudian slip   | Freudova omaška   | complete equivalence  |
| a Gordian knot/cut the Gordian knot                                       | gordijski čvor; presjeći gordijski čvor                   | complete equivalence  |
| grow like Topsy   | niču (rastu) kao gljive <poslije kiše>                    | partial equivalence   |
| if Mohammed will not go to the mountain, the mountain must go to Mohammed | ako neće Muhamed brijegu, mora brijeg Muhamedu            | complete equivalence  |
| a Jack of all trades (and/but master of none)                             | majstor svih zanata; majstor kvariš; sveznalica-neznalica | zero equivalence      |
| Johnny-come-lately  | zakašnjeli pridošlica                                     | zero equivalence      |
| keep up with the Joneses  | držati korak s kim, s čim                                 | partial equivalence   |
| let George do it  | prebaciti lopticu; svaliti što na čija leđa               | zero equivalence      |
| live/lead the life of Riley/Reilly  | živjeti kao car (kralj)                                   | partial equivalence   |
| (be a) nosey Parker/parker  | tko zabada nos  | partial equivalence   |
| (as) old as Methuselah  | star kao Metuzalem  | complete equivalence  |
| (open a) Pandora's box  | otvoriti Pandorinu kutiju                                 | complete equivalence  |
| the patience of Job   | (biti) strpljiv kao Job                                   | complete equivalence  |
| a Pyrrhic victory   | Pirova pobjeda  | complete equivalence  |
| raise Cain  | dići frku   | partial equivalence   |
| the real McCoy  | prava stvar   | partial equivalence   |
| rob Peter to pay Paul   | prelijevanje iz šupljeg u prazno                          | zero equivalence      |
| a smart alec/aleck  | misлити da si popio svu pamet ovog svijeta                | partial equivalence   |
| sweet Fanny Adams/sweet FA/get sweet Fanny Adams                          | dobiti šipak (brus, <frišku> figu)                        | partial equivalence   |
| a Sisyphean task  | Sizifov posao   | complete equivalence  |
| the sword of Damocles   | Damoklov mač  | complete equivalence  |

Appendix III: Methods of translation and their frequency

| Method of translation | Frequency |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| partial equivalence   | 14        |
| complete equivalence  | 11        |
| zero equivalence      | 5         |