

WCES-2011

On the Macedonian equivalency of English plant idioms

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the analysis of English plant idioms and their Macedonian counterparts establishing the level of equivalency, or non-equivalency in some cases. In order to succeed in my attempt I bring forth theoretical input on idioms and equivalency as a process of translation. I also exhibit a clear overview of the observed idioms by undertaking a report analysis.
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Keywords: English plant idioms, Macedonian plant idioms, idiom equivalence.

1. Introduction

1.1. Idioms

The purpose of this paper is to observe the way in which English plant idioms are represented in the Macedonian language. By that I mean to observe not just whether or not English plant idioms have a Macedonian equivalent, but also how many of these equivalents observe the choice of the plant name instead of just giving a semantic equivalent. The aim of my research on plant idioms is to continue the effort that I have undertaken in an earlier paper, namely *English common names of plants and their Romanian counterparts* (2010). In that paper I argued that **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. I can say that idioms are colloquial metaphors requiring some foundational cognizance, information or experience, employed within a culture where the interlocutors must have a common reference point. If in the case of plant idioms, idioms with a metaphorical meaning can be construed as more universal since plants occur in all cultures as embodiments of particular features, I shall find that in the case of English plant idioms, things are not that clear cut.

1.2. Equivalency

After shedding some light upon the term *idiom*, I wish to turn your attention to **equivalency**. In Baker (2001: 77), I find a definition of equivalency as “the relationship of a source text (ST) and a target text (TT) that allows the TT to be a translation of the ST in the first place. Equivalence relationships are also said to hold between parts of STs and parts of TTs. [...] equivalence is commonly established on the basis of: the source language (SL) and target

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language (TL) words supposedly referring to the same thing in the real world, i.e. on the basis of their referential or denotative equivalence; the SL and TL words triggering the same or similar associations in the minds of native speakers of the two languages, i.e. their connotative equivalence; the SL and TL words being used in the same or similar contexts in their respective languages, i.e. what Koller (1989: 102) calls text-normative equivalence; the SL and TL words having the same effect on their respective readers, i.e. pragmatic (Koller 1989: 102) or dynamic equivalence (Nida 1964); the SL and TL words having similar orthographic or phonological features.” When referring to plant idioms, the concept of **textual equivalence** must come up, defined as the combination of similarities in ST and TT information flow and the cohesive roles of ST and TT devices in their respective texts. I may speak of functional equivalence when I deal with the translator’s decision as to which consideration to be taken into account at any time.

2. Corpus analysis

2.1. Materials and method

I have chosen 120 English idioms containing names of plant parts or types, trees, flowers, fruit and vegetables gathered from English language and specialised dictionaries. First I have introduced the terms idiom and equivalency, then I have looked for the Macedonian counterparts of the English idioms analysing their equivalency and frequency.

2.2. Results

The idioms I have analysed include plant parts or types, trees, flowers, fruit and vegetable idioms. I have also observed that some idioms displaying different plant names bear in fact the same meaning. Also some idioms may present one or more variants. Physiological or functional features of the plants and plant parts are put to display in the following: *branch out (into something)* (‘to diversify and go into new areas’), *branch off (from something) / branch out (from something)* (‘to separate off from something; to divide away from something’), *shake like a leaf* (‘To shake a lot because you are nervous or frightened’), *root of the problem* (‘an understanding of the causes or basis of a problem’), *rooted to something* (‘[of someone] firmly attached to something’), *rooted to the spot* (‘unable to move because of fear or surprise’), *Idleness is the root of all evil* (‘If you have no useful work to do, you will think of harmful things to do in order to amuse yourself’), *Money is the root of all evil* (‘People do many evil things in order to get rich’), *root someone or something out of something* (‘To seek and remove someone or something from something or some place; to seek to discover or bring something to light’), *put roots down (some place)* (‘To settle down somewhere; to make a place one’s permanent home’), *root something in something* (‘To start a plant growing roots in something’), *root something out* (‘To get rid of something completely; to destroy something to its roots or core’), *root something up* (‘[for a pig] to find something in the ground by digging with its nose’), *root around (for something)* (‘To dig or shuffle in or through something, looking for something’), *root for someone or something* (‘To cheer and encourage someone or something’), *rooted in something* (‘based on something; connected to a source or cause’), *take root* (‘Lit. [for a plant] to develop roots in soil or some other growing medium; Fig. to begin to take hold or have effect’), *root and branch* (‘changed or removed completely because it is bad’), *the grass roots* (‘the ordinary people in a society or political organization and not the leaders (often + of)’), *As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined* (‘A grown person will act the way he or she was taught to act as a child’), *bark up the wrong tree* (‘To make the wrong choice; to ask the wrong person; to follow the wrong course’), *cannot see the wood for the trees / cannot see the forest for the trees* (‘Cannot perceive the overview or important things because of concentrating too much on details’), *Go climb a tree!* (‘Go away and stop bothering me!’), *make like a tree and leave* (‘to leave; to depart’), *Money does not grow on trees* (‘it is not easy to get money’), *the tree is known by its fruit* (‘People judge your character by what you do’), *up a tree* (‘confused; without an answer to a problem; in difficulty; intoxicated’), *be out of your tree* (‘to be crazy or behaving in a strange way, sometimes because of drugs or alcohol’), *the top of the tree* (‘If someone is at the top of the tree, they are at the highest position in their job or in an organization’), *all oak and iron bound* (‘in good health; feeling good’), *Great oaks from little acorns grow /*

Mighty oaks from little acorns grow ('Immense things can come from small sources'), *Little strokes fell great oaks* ('Little strokes fell great oaks'), *reed before the wind lives on, while mighty oaks do fall* ('An insignificant, flexible person is more likely not to get hurt in a crisis than a prominent or rigid person'), *hold out the olive branch* / offer an olive branch* ('to offer to end a dispute and be friendly; to offer reconciliation'), *Red as a rose / red as a poppy / red as a cherry* ('bright red'), *a bed of roses* ('a luxurious situation; an easy life'), *come out smelling like a rose* ('To succeed; to do better than anyone else in some situation'), *Everything's coming up roses* ('Everything is really just excellent. Life is prosperous'), *a rose by any other name would smell as sweet* ('The nature of a thing is more important than what it is called'), *smell like a rose* ('to seem innocent'), *There's no rose without a thorn* ('To enjoy any beautiful or pleasant thing, you must endure something difficult or painful'), *not be all moonlight and roses* ('If a situation is not all moonlight and roses, it is not always pleasant'), *put the roses in somebody's cheeks / bring the roses to somebody's cheeks* ('To make someone look healthy'), *fresh as a daisy* ('very fresh; [of a person] always alert and ready to go'), *pushing up (the) daisies* ('dead and buried'), *gild the lily* ('to add ornament or decoration to something that is pleasing in its original state; to attempt to improve something that is already fine the way it is'), *shrinking violet* ('someone who is very shy and not assertive'), *thorn in someone's side / thorn in someone's flesh* ('a constant bother or annoyance to someone'), *grasp the nettle* ('to take action immediately in order to deal with an unpleasant situation'), *green as grass* ('very green'), *grass widow* ('a woman abandoned by her husband'), *let grass grow under one's feet* ('to do nothing; to stand still'), *snake in the grass* ('a sneaky and despised person'), *The grass is always greener on the other side* ('People always think they would be happier in a different set of circumstances'), *American as apple pie* ('quintessential American'), *in apple-pie order* ('in very good order; very well organized'), *sure as God made little green apples* ('absolutely certain'), *An apple a day keeps the doctor away*. ('Apples are so nutritious that if you eat an apple every day, you will not ever need to go to a doctor.'), *apple of (someone's eye)* ('someone's favourite person or thing; a boyfriend or a girlfriend'), *apple-polisher* ('a flatterer'), *apples and oranges* ('two entities that are not similar'), *Big Apple* ('New York City'), *How bout them apples? / How do you like them apples?* ('What do you think of that?'), *motherhood and apple pie* ('an often parodied sentiment expressed about allegedly quintessential elements of American home life'), *rotten apple* ('a single bad person or thing'), *rotten apple spoils the barrel* ('A bad person influences everyone he or she comes into contact with, making them bad too'), *upset the apple cart* ('to mess up or ruin something'), *She'll be apples* ('something that you say in order to tell someone that they do not need to worry and that everything will happen as it should'), *cherry-pick something / a bite of the cherry* ('to choose something very carefully'), *Life is just a bowl of cherries* ('everything is going well; life is carefree'), *go pear-shaped* ('if a plan goes pear-shaped, it fails'), *speak with a plum in your mouth* ('if someone speaks with a plum in their mouth, they speak in a way that shows they are from a very high social group'), *belt the grape* ('to drink wine or liquor heavily and become intoxicated'), *sour grapes* ('something that one cannot have and so disparages as if it were never desirable'), *brown as a berry* ('very brown from the sun; quite suntanned'), *crazy as a peach-orchard boar* ('acting as if insane'), *cut your peaches* ('go on with what you were doing'), *a banana republic* ('a small, poor country with a weak or dishonest government'), *an old chestnut* ('a subject, idea, or joke which has been discussed or repeated so many times that it is not interesting or funny any more'), *off one's nut* ('crazy, silly'), *(a) hard nut to crack / (a) tough nut to crack* ('difficult person or problem to deal with'), *He that would eat the kernel must crack the nut* ('You have to work if you want to get anything good'), *in a nut shell* ('[of news or information] in a (figurative) capsule; in summary'), *nut case* ('a crazy person; an irrational person'), *nut up* ('to go crazy'), *talk like a nut* ('to say stupid things'), *do your nut* ('to become extremely angry'), *use a sledgehammer to crack a nut* ('to do something with more force than is'), *down to chili and beans* ('very poor; down to one's last penny'), *full of beans / full of prunes* ('full of nonsense; talking nonsense'), *not know beans (about someone or something)* ('to know nothing about someone or something'), *not worth a hill of beans and not amount to a hill of beans / not worth beans* ('worthless'), *spill the beans* ('to give away a secret or a surprise'), *not have a bean* ('to have no money'), *a bean counter* ('an impolite way of describing someone who is responsible for the financial decisions within a company') etc.

While trying to find Macedonian equivalents for the above explained idioms, the research revealed that most of the idioms have an equivalent. However, I have noticed that there are some instances in which they do not have one. I refer hereby to the cultural differences between the English (especially American) and Macedonian societies, instances where one cannot find equivalents because of the lack of similarities (here I can mention: *make like a tree and leave*, *root something in something*, *spill the beans*, *carrot-and-stick*, *American as apple pie*, *Big Apple*, *How*

bout them apples? / How do you like them apples?, pepper someone or something with something, know one's onions, a banana republic etc). Further on, I would like to focus on those idioms which have a Macedonian equivalent. I could infer that there are two categories of equivalents: expressions which, although having a similar meaning, do not denote any plant name (at this point I might speak of referential or denotative equivalence) and expressions which include a plant name (may it refer to the same plant as in the English idiom or to another) – when I imply connotative or even dynamic equivalence. In the first category of idiom equivalency I may include: *gather life's roses* – (*M* uziva vo zivotnite zadovolstva, pie od izvorite na zivotot); *come up smelling like a rose* / *come up smelling the* (English) *rose* – (*M* ubava Anglicanka); *bark up the wrong tree* (*M* se javuva na pogresna adresa, cuka na pogresna vrata – the term used here is wrong paths/door); *Go climb a tree!* (*M* nema leb bez motika – here instead of a plant name a common name-a garden tool is used); *To be a gum tree* (*M* pecen e, mav mu e rabotata, vrvka mu e rabotata, vo kasa e), *Money is the root of all evil* (*M* parite se otepuvacka instead of 'root' I find 'makes you dead'); *not let the grass grow under one's feet* – (*M* voda sedi / miruva, toj ne sedi / ne miruva); *down to chili and beans* (*M* na/do prosjacki stap, 'stuck to the ground, so poor'); *full of beans* / *full of prunes* (*M* zdrav i prav – beating the water); *alike as (two) peas in a pod* (*M* kako jajce na jajce); *sure as God made little green apples* (*M* poveke od sigurno, sto otsto – the term is 'percentage'); *apples and oranges* (*M* babini devetini / babi i zabi – the fruit names are replaced by an animal name and/or living being); *go pear-shaped* (*M* otide po gavolite – meaning 'it went down the drain'); *crazy as a peach-orchard boar* (*M* mu nedostausva letva vo glavata – a literal translation would be 'gone with the raft' or 'without a stave'); *let grass grow under one's feet* (*M* da ja ostavis rabotata sama da tece, vodata miruva, toj ne miruva), *keep off the grass* – (*M* ne mesaj se – an exact translation would be 'the ground under his feet stinks') etc.

If I examine the Macedonian plant idioms I can see, as previously stated, such idioms in which the same plant name as in the English one occurs, and such that contain another plant name (instance based on the cultural differences already mentioned). The following pertain to idioms exhibiting (almost) the same plant: *shake like a leaf* (*M* se trese kako list, or it can be also translated with: kako prat co voda, kako mace/); *rooted to the spot* (*M* vkorenit vo mesto, or vgnezden); *cannot see the wood for the trees / cannot see the forest for the trees* (*M* ne gi gleda drvjata od sumata); *Money does not grow on trees* (*M* parite ne rastat na drvo); *up a tree* (*M* bespomosen, zbunet); *red as a poppy* (*M* crven kako bulka); *There's no rose without a thorn* (*M* sekoja ruza ima svoj trn); *put the roses in somebody's cheeks / bring the roses to somebody's cheeks* (*M* se osvezi, mu se vrati zdravjeto); *rotten apple and rotten apple spoils the barrel* (*M* so kogo si, takov si; krusata pod krusa paga); *speak with a plum in your mouth* (*M* od visokoto dobro utro, zboruva so kompir(sliva) vo usta); *green as grass* (*M* zelen kako treva); *The grass is always greener on the other side* (*M* tugoto grozje e poslatko – here *the grass* is replaced by the term 'grapes'), etc. Most Macedonian idioms presented in this paragraph are almost exact translations of the English ones. As for the idioms containing other names of plants, we have: *it's apples and oranges* (*M* ne mesaj kruski i jabolka – here *oranges* is replaced by 'kruski-pears'); *there is no wheat without chaff* (*M* vo sekoe brasno trici / vo sekoe stado crna ovca); *like shelling peas* (*M* lesno/prosto e kako boza – instead of peas (a vegetable) we find a drink 'thick, slightly fermented millet drink made from barley'); *cherry-pick something / a bite of the cherry* (*M* izbira / prebira mnogu vnimatelno, bara detelina so cetiri lista); *cut your peaches* (*M* prodolzi so toa sto si pocnal, ne ja seci grankata, rabotata – 'do not cut leaves to the dogs', observing 'branch' instead of *peaches*, but the verb *cut* is preserved); *Fine words butter no parsnips* (*M* edno cveke ne ja pravi proletta - again the vegetable name is replaced by 'flower'); *Life is just a bowl of cherries* (*M* kako med i mleko, postela od rozi 'like a flower field') etc.

3. Result analysis

3.1. Discussion

In the previous section, I gave an account of English plant idioms and their Macedonian counterparts. I have seen that most English idioms have an equivalent, but a number of idioms still remains which bear no representation in the Macedonian language, a fact induced by cultural differences. These cultural differences also determine a shift in the use of plant names within the two languages resulting in dynamic equivalents. Looking at the numbers I can observe that from 120 English idioms analysed, only 31 do not account for a Macedonian equivalent, which represent 26%. Deepening my investigation I find that, from 89 Macedonian counterparts, 45 (i.e. 37%) do not

exhibit plant or plant part names, though issuing the same meaning. Interesting enough, from the 44 remaining Macedonian plant idioms, 39 (i.e. 33%) observe the English choice of the plant, while the other 5 (4%) take a different plant name. For a clear perspective see Figure 1. My research has clearly shown that though most English plant idioms have a Macedonian equivalent from the point of view of semantics, these counterparts do not always take a plant name. Plant names may be replaced by concrete as well as abstract nouns, and though they show the same meaning as the English one, the mirroring of this meaning is specific to the respective language.

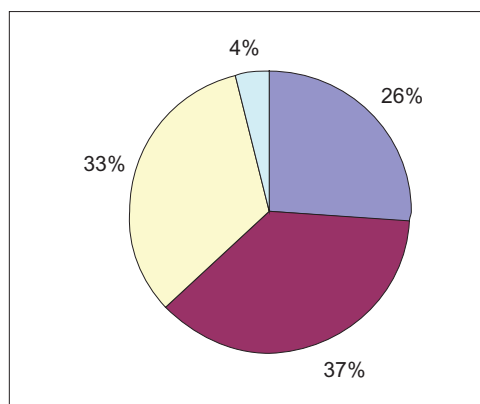


Figure 1. English Plant Idioms in Macedonian: 26% - no Macedonian counterparts; 33% - Macedonian counterparts containing the same plant names; 37% - Macedonian counterparts not containing plant names; 4% - Macedonian counterparts containing different plant names

The idioms containing plant names are also characteristic to the country they pertain to. Thus, although most English idioms built with the help of flower or tree names, as well as plant parts, find an almost perfect literal translation in Macedonian, idioms sharing vegetable and fruit names mostly take another plant name in Macedonian. This is possible because the same fruit or vegetables can take different connotations in the minds of the people pertaining to different cultures, people not sharing the same mentality and life concepts.

3.2. Conclusions

There is no perfect equivalency between English and Macedonian idioms, a fact proven in the above sections. I could infer this from the analysis of the 120 English plant idioms presented, of which only 89 displayed Macedonian counterparts. I could also observe that only a small percentage (i.e. 33%) of the idioms actually respects the choice of the English plant name and preserves it within the Macedonian language. Another conclusion that can be drawn is that one of the determiners of this "imperfect" equivalency is the cultural difference between the English and the Macedonian society, using different terms to express the same things.

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