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SPORTS IN METAPHOR AND METAPHOR IN SPORTS

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SUMMARY

This paper looks at the metaphors and idioms in the English language that have sports as their motivation and attempts to draw certain parallels with their corresponding semantic equivalents in Serbian. To establish the origin of an idiom is not an easy task, it is even more difficult to segregate them in groups relating to the metaphorical motivation. One of the groups that is worth exploring relates to those that seem to be sport generated. They are probably so prevalent among metaphoric constructions on account of their convenience as an interplay between different meanings which at the same is indeed a real play between people. What distinguishes them from other types of expressions is that they include sport terminology while referring to something totally different, sometimes involving ordinary folk, sometimes even state dignitaries. What they all have in common though is the transfer of meaning, from one sematic field into a different arena, this time it being a sport arena. This would imply that phraseology encompasses proverbs, sayings, idiolect and every other form of collocated wording used to denote an object, advice, idea or anything else with a meaning that, to some extent, deviates from the exact meaning of the words used in them. In the methodology chapter, the paper looks at more than 20 different metaphorical sport expressions, while the introduction, results, discussion and conclusion explore the theoretical bases that underpin any twist in meaning once a group of several words are joined together, thereby changing the sum of their individual meanings.

Key Words: metaphor, sports, language, meaning, motivation, English, Serbian..

INTRODUCTION

In each cultural context and in each language, there are typical modes of expression that assemble words in order to signify something that is not limited to the sum of the meanings of the single words that compose them; an extra meaning, usually metaphorical, becomes part and parcel of this particular assembly. A particular type of metaphorical expression is seen in phraseology and idioms. Idioms and phraselogisms are not generated accidentally; they are junctions of collective thought and wisdom reached through a concise and metaphorical expression. To establish the origin of an idiom is not an easy task. However, if we decide to take such an endeavour upon ourselves we shall soon discover that their genesis is motivated by different aspects of human existence, sports playing an important role in it. As the knowledge on phraseology increases, and as new historical facts emerge, there seem to be even more questions to be answered as to why there are particular words and notions included in idioms and when they were first used.

Answers to the abovementioned questions appear to be even more important in the situations when particular idioms and metaphors need to be translated in another language. Lexical composition of an idiom in one language need not necessarily correspond to that in another language. Metaphors that have sports as the driver and generator of their lexical composition may be expressed via a different aspect of human or natural interaction in another. This paper looks at the metaphors and idioms in the English language that have sports as their motivation, and attempts to draw certain parallels with the corresponding semantic equivalents in Serbian. This may be of

particular relevancy in the translation practice since, just as Anuradha Dingwaney (1995) defined it to translate a metaphor from one language to another involves a certain amount of violence in meaning, particularly when the translated culture is seen as somewhat alien.

METHODS

Definition of samples

For decades now, idioms have been a part of linguistics that has never been decidedly defined. Definitions of phraseology are everything but consistent. There are a few reasons for that. A phraseologism is seen by some as anything that has a solidly moulded form with no variations in lexical composition regardless of the usage, argot, expressiveness, poetical note or frequency as long as it has an invariable lexical composition known as such to speakers of the language. This would imply that phraseology encompasses proverbs, sayings, idiolect and every other form of collocated wording used to denote an object, advice, idea or anything else with a meaning that, to some extent, deviates from the exact meaning of the words used in them. Others are far stricter in their understanding of phraseology and believe that only those language constructions whose meaning is clearly different from the sum of meanings of the secluded words, can be called metaphorical phraseologisms.

Popular sayings can generally be subdivided into five categories:

Historical – popular sayings attributed to famous people of the past (for example, Marie Antoinette's *After us the deluge*), scientific – popular sayings attributed to great scientists and philosophers of the past (Archimedes's *Eureka!*); literary – popular sayings associated with famous writers (Shakespeare's *All the world's a stage*) patriotic – popular sayings coined by British or American political and military leaders (Thomas Jefferson' *All men are created equal*) or sports – popular sayings attributed to sports figures and journalists (Joe Louis, Knute Rockne, Vince Lombardi): *You can run, but you can't hide; Win this one for the Gipper; Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing* etc (Titelman, 2000).

Since this paper focuses on metaphors in sports, and sports in metaphor the sample that it ponders are 24 sayings that include sports as their motivational basis, with certain explanations as to what they mean, how they came into circulation and when they were first used:

The ball is in your court. It is your turn to make the next move. Originated in the United States in the mid-twentieth century and refers to the game of tennis. Another word may be substituted for *court*.

Don't change the rules in the middle of the game. When people have become involved in something on the assumption that certain rules are binding, they will be angered when they are changed arbitrarily. Often shortened to *don't change the rules*.

Don't hit a man when he's down. Don't attack someone who is already hurt. Originally a boxing phrase. According to the boxing rules, you cannot hit another boxer when he is down; you can strike him only when he gets up after the fall. The proverb has been traced back to Answer to Gairdner by Thomas Cranmer in the sixteenth century. The proverb is found in varying forms: *Never hit a man when he's down; Never kick a guy except when he is down; There can be no harm in kicking a man when he's down; Why hit a man when he's down? You can't kick a man when he's down*, etc. The metaphorical phrase *to hit a man when he's down* is also used.

Don't play with fire. Don't take unnecessary risks. First attested in the United States in Eugene O'Neill's (1928) *Strange Interlude*. The proverb is found in varying forms: *If you play with fire, you're apt to get burned; Those who play with fire must expect to get burned; If you play with fire you will burn your finger sooner or later*, etc.

Don't put the cart before the horse. Don't get things in the wrong order. The proverb is found in varying forms: *Don't get the cart before the horse; Never put the cart before the horse; It's like putting the cart before the horse; The cart is in front of the horse, etc. To put the cart in front of the horse* means to do things in the wrong order and is commonly used as a figure of speech. Similar phrases were used by the Greeks and the Romans.

Don't swap horses in midstream. Don't change leaders when they are in the midst of important projects. Probably originated in the United States. Used by Abraham Lincoln in his 1864 presidential campaign. The proverb is found in varying forms: *Don't change horses in the middle of the stream; Don't change horses in the midstream; Don't swap horses while crossing a stream; Don't change horses in the middle of the river; It never pays to change horses in midstream; It's no use changing horses in midstream; Never change horses in the middle of the stream*, etc. The proverb is often shortened to *swap (change) horses in midstream*.

The game is not worth the candle. The gain is not worth the effort. The saying dates from the pre-electric era, when candles were used for lighting; thus, continuing a game at night was not worth even the cost of the candles. The proverb is of French origin. Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) is quoted as saying, *Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle*. In 1678, it was included in John Ray's collection of proverbs. Although it is usually

used in negative, the affirmative version, *The game is worth the candle*, is also sometimes heard.

It takes two to tango. Certain activities require mutual cooperation to achieve a common goal. Originated in the United States in the 1920s. Popularized by Pearl Bailey's recording of the 1952 song "Takes Two to Tango" (Hoffman & Maning, 1952).

It's a different (new) ball game (ballpark). Things have changed radically; the new situation is nothing at all like what we're used to. Originally, the saying meant literally a ball game different from baseball, such as basketball, football, etc. It has been common since the 1930s and is now used figuratively. Often used with the word *whole* before *different* or *new*.

It's not over till it's over. Never give up hope until the outcome is final: in life, as in baseball, miracles can and often do, happen. Attributed to Yogi Berra in 1973, when he was managing the ragtag New York Mets. Probably the most famous of all Yogiisms. *It ain't over till it's over and It's never over till it's over* are variations. George Bush is usually given credit for saying, "Politics is like baseball. It isn't over till the last batter swings".

It's survival of the fittest. Only the strongest ones survive or succeed. The saying originated in the latter half of the nineteenth century with Darwin's theory of natural selection as "survival of the fittest." Later, this biological principle of evolutionary progress was applied to any form of struggle for survival or success.

It's the only game in town. It's the only available option. The catch phrase dates from 1900 or earlier. The full version is: *I know it's crooked, but it's the only game in town*. In *Hollywood Husbands*, Jackie Collins (1986) revamped the old saying, adding to it something very familiar and likeable: "It's the only ballgame in the park." Often shortened to the only game in town.

Monday morning quarterbacking. Second-guessing. Criticism after the fact. Football games are traditionally played on Sunday, so Monday was often devoted to analyzing the errors made by the quarterbacks and postulating what they should have done. *Monday morning quarterback* is also a common form.

Slow and steady wins the race. Keep on doing something steadily and you'll succeed. Lexicographers usually refer this saying to Aesop's fable "The Hare and the Tortoise." The Hare, confident that it could beat the slower Tortoise, fell asleep after having run very fast at the beginning of the race, while the Tortoise slowly and steadily continued, reached the finish line, and won the race. Also found in the variant: *Slow and easy wins the race*. "You rest all you want," Stu said. "Slow and easy wins the race." – Stephen King (1978), *The Stand*.

Step up to the plate. Face a task or responsibility with courage. This American phrase is of recent origin and comes from baseball. It alludes to home plate, where a batter stands to face the pitcher.

That's the name of the game. That's the most essential point of something, what it's all about. This saying originated in the United States in the early 1960s, and has been in common use since about 1965. It was popularized through the movie, *Fame is the Name of the Game* (MacDougall, 1966) and the TV series, *The Name of the Game* (1968-1971).

1979. "How are we doing?"

"We're making money."

"That's the name of the game, isn't it?" – Howard Fast (1979), The *Establishment*.

There's no joy in Mudville. After all the hopes and expectations, defeat is hard to bear. The proverb was coined by American balladeer Ernest Lawrence Thayer (1863-1940), whose poem and song, "Casey at the Bat," published on June 3, 1888, in the *San Francisco Examiner*, became an overnight hit. The Mudville fans expected their baseball team to win, but they were badly disappointed when their beloved Casey lost the game. The saying is often used in variants with other place names.

Trust everyone, but cut the cards. It's OK to trust everyone, but always take precautions to protect yourself just in case. The proverb comes from the game of cards where players cut the cards to prevent cheating. It was used by Finley Peter Dunne (1867-1936) in *Mr. Dooley's Opinions* (1900). The proverb is an American variant of the Russian Доверяй, но проверяй ("Trust, but verify") and was popularized by President Regan.

Always trust your fellow man. And always cut the cards. – Robert Fulghum (1986), *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*.

Turnabout is fair play. Reversing a situation or relations is only fair. The proverb has been traced back to 1755 in *the Life of Captain Dudley Bradstreet*, and was given literary use by the Scottish novelist Robert Luis Stevenson (1868-94) and American writer Lloyd Osborne (1868-1947) in their novel, *The Wrecker* (1892).

You had your chance then; seems to me it's mine now. Turn about's fair play. – Robert Louis Stevenson & Lloyd Osborne, *The Wrecker* (Titelman 2000)

Who's counting? No one cares, so go ahead and do as you please. *But* often precedes the saying.

"The target will be reached in six minutes, thirty-four seconds unless we encounter unexpected head winds over the mountains which will extend our time to six minutes, fourty-eight seconds or perhaps fifty-five seconds, but then who's counting?" – Robert Ludlum (1988), *The Icarus Agenda*.

Win this one for the Gipper. If you need a reason to win, do it for someone who inspires you. The proverb originated in the United States in the 1920s and is attributed to Knute Rockne, then-coach of the Notre Dame football team. One of his best players, George Gipp (the Gipper), died at the age of twenty-five. Before he died, he told Knute Rockne: "Rock, someday when things look real tough for Notre Dame, ask the boys to go out and win for me." The coach honored his deathbed request and Notre Dame defeated Army by an unprecedented score of 12-6. In 1940, *Knute Rockne – All-American* (Robert Buckner, 1940), a motion picture based on the life of George Gipp, was released, and Ronald Reagan played the Gipper. "Win this one for the Gipper" became one of the major political slogans of Ronald Reagan.

Some day, when things are tough, maybe you can ask the boys to go in there and win just one for the Gipper! – Robert Buckner, *Knute Rockne – All-American*, spoken by Ronald Reagan

A winner never quits, and a quitter never wins. If you want to win, you can't quit. *A quitter never wins, and a winner never quits* is a variant of the proverb.

1990. "I keep telling him a quitter never wins, and a winner never quits, but I'm not sure he's going to quit smoking." – Overheard during diner

You can't beat a man at his own game. You can't surpass people in their own environment or if they're more qualified. The proverb has been traced back to the 1756 *Papers of Henry Laurens*. The proverb is found in varying forms: *Anyone can be fooled at the other man's game; You can beat the bastards at their own game; You can't beat the rich at their own game; You can beat the IRS at their own game*, etc. (Titelman, 2000).

"No, no, I'll come back, you'll see… I'll beat the bastards at their own game!" he [Konig] added, with a ferocity that startled Queenie. – Michael Korda (1985), *Queenie.*

"You said you were going to beat Jadwin at his own game. How?" – Philip Friedman (1992), *Inadmissible Evidence.*

You have to learn to walk before you can run. Learning the basics prepares you for more advanced tasks. The proverb has been traced back to *Douce* (c.1350), and in 1670, it was included in John Ray's book of English proverbs. It is first attested in the United States in a letter of George Washington's dated July 20, 1794. The saying occurs in varying forms: You must learn to walk before you can run; *You got to learn to walk before you can run; One mustn't be expected to fly before he is able to walk*, etc.

1794 - We must walk as other countries have done before we can run. – George Washington, *Writings of George Washington* (Titelman, 2000).

1985 - "Do you want me to take my clothes off in any special way?"

"Just take them off the way you normally do," Goldner said, puffing his cigar. "Nothing fancy. We must learn to walk before we can run." – Michael Korda (1985), *Queenie.*

RESULTS

Comparing and contrasting phraseologisms existing in American English and Serbian shows that almost half of them are mutually translatable. Of course, there will always be those locally generated ones, such as "kruži kao kiša oko Kragujevca" or "no joy in Mudville" that will have to be left to translators' own devices. Once the expression is identified, the next problem consists in decoding it. All authors agree that dictionaries are not always reliable tools in this sense. First, they do not contain all phraseologisms, partly because every day new ones are formed and partly because they add considerably to the dictionary's physical volume and it is often not practical to include them all. There are phraseologisms that are arguably universal. Some of them are taken over from other languages in a form that is conspicuously foreign, but have nevertheless become popular. Such are "all roads lead to Rome", "carpe diem/seize the day", "veni, vidi, vici", "Pyrrhic victory". If experiences of the human kind were all different, the meanings of their symbols would also be different, but they are not (Sanders Peirce, 1935). It is therefore reasonable to assume that there are relatively identical and invariable elements in the experiences of each member of a group of people.

This paper is part of a larger research which took into consideration metaphorical expressions from many other source domains. What transpires from the larger and more comprehensive analysis is that American phraseologisms are very present in everyday speech, covering all kinds of topics and referring to different spheres of life. They have a very pragmatic function and are useful tools in all kinds of situations. They convey orders, feelings of dismay or jubilance. Serbian phraseologisms, on the other hand, lack the pragmatic facility so abundantly present in American English. What they have to offset that shortcoming is their evident poetical note. Rhyme is far more present in Serbian phraseology. In fact, 2.5 more Serbian phraseologisms rhyme than is the case in American English, even though English morphology is more convenient for rhyming. This can be explained by centuries of oral tradition is Serbian, which prefers rhyme and preserves it better.

DISCUSSION

It is difficult to hypothesize about the existence of objective experiential meaning without having a clear, sound and axiomatic position. "Because so many of the concepts that are important to us are either abstract or not clearly delineated in our experience (the emotions, ideas, time, etc.), we need to get a grasp on them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms (spatial orientations, objects, etc.)" (Lakoff & Johnsen, 2003, p. 116). The relations between thoughts, reactions and metaphors have long merited thorough and productive linguistic explorations (Whorf, 1975).

Many if not most of these proverbs and sayings, while used in America, are of British origin. Chaucer, Shakespeare, and other British writers originated and contributed a great deal to the preservation and popularization of some English proverbs used by Americans. Proverbs no longer come mostly from Britain. Born in America, many of them travel to British shores and enrich British English. Those two nations at least seem to share similar views on the world - "What can be represented in clauses includes aspects of the physical world (its processes, objects, relations, spatial and temporal parameters), aspects of the 'mental world' of thoughts, feelings, sensations and so forth, and aspects of the social world" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 134). And yet, these words are related to experience too, albeit via a more distant and more mediated linkage. The role of the mediator is played by the symbol, or a whole plethora of symbols which we can array in a series conforming to the degree of their abstraction. That conforms to Korzybski's (1948) general semantics which implies that abstractions always seek to be exemplified. According to Mckee (2003), just because people say when you ask them that this is what they think about a particular text, it does not mean that this is what it means to them in their everyday lives.

They exist independent from the conscience of each individual subject, even though they are not independent from the general and mutual subject, in this case: the community awareness. In such a situation, it no longer matters whether the conception includes more or fewer elements of images or abstractions, or, in other words, whether it is closer to sensation or notion. It does matter though, whether it results from a sport-related or some other experience, emotions (Ogden & Richards, 1923, p. 124), or through the process of detachment, separation and isolation of certain elements and underestimation of others, even though one could reasonably claim that every conception of sport, manifested in metaphor contains, or at least indirectly assumes a certain element of experience detached from the rest of the experiential whole in which it commonly appears, generalized, extrapolated or transformed by another action of the thinking apparatus.

This again reinforces the notion of dualism between the empiric and actual participation in sport and the contemplative process that uses them as motivation. In his seminal work, Ernest Cassirer (1923) expanded the notion of meaning onto numerous symbolic forms which include human competition. Lakoff and Johnsen (2003, p. 159) say that people do not believe that there is such a thing as objective (absolute and unconditional) truth or individual sport-related experience, though it has been a long-standing theme in Western culture that there is.

CONCLUSION

We always understand each other – if the apparatus that analyses our sensations is the same. It is no longer about the quality of the sensation. The attempts to introduce a coherent classification of elements involved in meaningful sensations are not new (Morris, 1946, p. 22). Sport metaphors are junctions of collective thought and wisdom reached through a concise and metaphorical expression. To establish the origin of an idiom is not an easy task. However, if we decide to undertake such an endeavour upon ourselves we shall soon discover that their genesis is motivated by different aspects of human existence, sports playing an important role in it. They are not equally present in different languages, but it seems that sport-related metaphorical expressions are particularly productive in the English Language.

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