TOPONYMICAL STRUCTURES IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN NOTES ON SOME PHRASEOLOGICAL STRUCTURES IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN INVOLVING PROPER NAMES[1]

Abstract: *The present paper represents a comparative approach to the toponymical structures in English and Romanian. The main toponymical structures that constitute the object of this article are those encountered in various phraseological units in both languages. More precisely, the article focuses on the place names that occur in English and Romanian expressions and phraseological units. They are presented from different perspectives, including the linguistic and cultural points of view. The material was selected from English and Romanian phraseological dictionaries, including The New Oxford Dictionary of English, as well as other theoretical sources.*

Key words*: phraseological unit, proper name, place names, toponymical structure.*

I. Introduction

Phraseology represents "a section of the vocabulary that encompasses a class of words having a set character, equivalent to a lexical unit" (Groza, 2005:16).

As defined by Ch. Bally, the French linguist who had a great contribution to the development of modern phraseology, this field is not very recent, however it is worth exploring it in detail. In this respect, recently, special attention has been paid to the field of phraseology, while research on specific aspects is rather infrequent.

The present paper represents an approach to these specific aspects, laying special emphasis on the toponymical structures in English and Romanian phraseology. By toponymical structures, one understands those phraseological units that contain place names in fixed structures. More precisely, the aim of the paper is to identify these place names that are part of the expressions and phraseological units in both languages, and to explain their use taking into account various aspects, including the linguistic and cultural aspects involved by the phraseological units that represent the main substance of the present contribution.

The approach starts with a complex classification of these phraseological units from a structural point of view. As noted, phraseological units in every language are made up of different parts of speech, or of different elements which are regarded as relevant for a number of reasons.

[1] **Gisela CUMPENAŞU**, University of Pitesti, Romania.
necu_gisela@yahoo.com

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I.1. Phraseological units containing essential elements in people's life

Some of them contain names of the parts of the body, sense organs, natural elements, animals, colours, clothing and food, etc. Generally, these elements are frequently encountered in such constructions because they represent essential aspects of everyday life.

In this connection, it is important to notice two aspects. When comparing the two variants, i.e. the English and the Romanian ones, it becomes obvious that most of the elements mentioned above, which are part of the units in question, fail to occur in the Romanian variant or translation, though they do occur in a few cases. Here are some examples that can illustrate the above contention:

*to have a **bee** in one's bonnet* – Romanian *a avea o păsărică* (DFRE, p.44)
*to flag a dead **horse*** – Rom. *a încerca să învii morţii* (DFRE, p.215)
*to run a wild **goose** chase* – Rom. *a încerca imposibilul* (DFRE,p.214)
*to have one's **knife** in somebody* – Rom. *a avea un dinte împotriva cuiva* (DFRE, p.38)

On the contrary:

*to get one's **claws** into somebody* – Rom. *a-şi înfige ghearele in cineva* [1](DFRE, p.231)
*to have a foul **mouth*** – Rom. *a avea gura rea* (DFRE, p. 39)
*it is not the **coat** that makes the man* – Rom. *nu haina îl face pe om* (DFRE, p. 176)

I.2. Phraseological units containing proper names

References to the Bible greatly account in the construction of phraseological units and idioms, because they contain proper names that are culturally relevant in any society, especially in Anglo-Saxon, and more widely Christian, societies. In such cases, however, there may be variations in translation – cf. most of the examples mentioned above:

*Holy **Moses**!* – Rom. *sfinte **Sisoe**!* (DFRE, p. 512)
*not to know a man/somebody from **Adam*** – Rom. *a nu putea suferi pe cineva* (DFRE, p. 459)
*in **Adam**'s time; when **Adam** was a boy* – Rom. *pe vremuri* (DFRE, p.399)

[1] *The examples taken from Dictionar frazeologic roman-englez are marked by letters DFRE.*

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A different possibility may appear, though: when the Biblical proper name is encountered in the Romanian variant, and is not present in the English idiom, e.g.

> Rom. *în costumul lui **Adam** (şi / sau **Eva**)* – Eng. *in one's birthday suit* (DFRE, p. 222).

In this category of elements, which are often used in such structures, one can notice a set of common proper names or names of nationalities that, for obvious reasons, cannot have a similar Romanian counterpart. However, the translation of these phraseological units into our language is possible, even if this task was not quite simple for the linguists, translators or lexicographers, e.g.

> *to put the half **Nelson** on somebody* – Rom. *a ţintui pe cineva la pământ* (DFRE, p.608)
> *it is all **Greek** to me* – Rom. *nu pricep o iotă* (DFRE, p.423)
> *every **Jack** must have his **Jill*** – Rom. *a-şi găsi naşul* (DFRE, 169)
> *not for the love of **Mike*** – Rom. *pentru nimic in lume* (DFRE, 394)
> *to give a **Roland** for an **Oliver*** – Rom. *a plăti cu aceeaşi monedă* (DFRE, p. 206)
> *to shoot the **Niagara*** – Rom. *a încerca imposibilul* (DFRE, p. 214)
> *to be hail-fellow-well-met with **Tom, Dick** and **Harry*** – Rom. *a se înhăita cu oricine/cu te miri cine* (DFRE, p. 235)

Generally speaking, all the proper names involved in these phraseological units emphasize the idea of cultural, linguistic, social, geographical and ethnic identity or belonging. Therefore, elaborate studies of these phraseological units are likely to lead to identifying a special bond between language and culture.

I.3. Phraseological units containing periods of time

This category includes especially days of the week with a special significance.

> *to find **Sunday** - a se uita cruciş* (DFRE, p.611)
> *in one's **Sunday**'s best, in one's **Sunday** clothes – îmbrăcat (ca) de duminică, în haine de gală* (*DFRE, p. 197).*

I.4. Phraseological units containing place names

Toponymy, or the study of place names, deals precisely with those vocabulary items that form part of a language's cultural stock. Generally speaking,

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English and Romanian toponymy is rich, complex and dynamic. Therefore, a thorough study is devoted to those phraseological units that have place names as their component parts. Although these toponymical structures are not very numerous, they obviously constitute an extremely important group of units.

From the cultural point of view, one can distinguish a number of sources that form the basis of these expressions or phraseological units. Consequently, the variations of translation in those cases, too, will be emphasized, e.g.

> *to put **Yorkshire** over somebody* – Rom. *a păcăli cumplit pe cineva* (DFRE, p. 381).

In keeping with the general classification regarding these place names, one could note the following categories:

1.4.1. Phraseological units containing place names in the United Kingdom and Ireland

Some of the English place names selected for the present research refer to different *places in the United Kingdom*. They have the feature of bearing a lot of meanings in the respective language, e.g.

*to carry coals to **Newcastle*** [1] (NODE, p.1248)– (*Newcastle* is an industrial town in NE England, a port on the river Tyne); the translation of this phraseological unit into Romanian obviously does not assume the presence of the same place name, that is why the variant of translation is "a merge la vie cu strugurii în poală / traistă / batistă".

Another similar phraseological unit that is widely used is *to send somebody to **Coventry***, (NODE, p.423) - which has the meaning "to refuse to associate with or speak to someone", whose closest Romanian translation is "a trimite pe cineva in exil". The explanation of the use of this place name is, generally, the following: it seems to stem from the extreme unpopularity of soldiers stationed in Coventry (an industrial city), who were cut off socially by the citizens, or because Royalist prisoners were sent there during the English Civil War, the city being staunchly Parlamentarian.

The phraseological unit *a vicar of **Bray*** (NODE, p.220), is translated into Romanian by "un oportunist fara pereche", which alludes to the protagonist of an 18th-century song, who kept his benefice from Charles II's reign to George I's by changing his beliefs to suit the times. (NODE).

[1] The examples taken from *the New Oxford Dictionary of English* are marked by the letters NODE.

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Similarly, the phraseological unit *to put **Yorkshire** on / over somebody* (NODE, p. 2143), translated as "a păcăli cumplit pe cineva", contains a place name which represents, in fact, "a former county of northern England traditionally divided into East, West and North Ridings". The 18th-century phrase to "put Yorkshire on someone" meant "to deceive someone of something".

The phraseological expression *to grin like a **Cheshire** cat* (NODE, p. 314) contains a famous place name in England, and it is translated by "a râde ca prostul". This variant of translation comes from the fact that *Cheshire cat* refers to a cat depicted with a broad fixed grin, as popularized through Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*"). Several attempts at explaining the phrase were made. The most conspicuous one is that in Cheshire there are quite numerous dairy farms, hence the cats grin because of the abundance of milk and cream. *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* says that *grinning like a Cheshire cat* is "an old simile, deriving from the fact that "cheese was formerly sold in Cheshire moulded like a cat that looked as though it was grinning" (v. Martin Gardner: 1999. *The Annotated Alice: Alice's adventures in Wonderland & Through the looking glass*. W.W. Norton); the cheese was cut from the tail end, so that the last part eaten was the head of the smiling cat.

Another familiar expression that contains a place name is *this is **Liberty Hall*** (NODE, p. 1063), the translation of which is "simţiţi-vă ca acasă", where *Liberty Hall* is a place name where one may do as one likes.

In the same category, one can select other expressions or phraseological units widely used in English, such as:

*to fight like **Kilkenny** cats* (NODE, p. 1008) – an expression that refers to "two cats from Kilkenny in Ireland, which, according to legend, fought until their tails remained".

*to have kissed the **Blarney** stone* (NODE, p. 185) is an expression used for someone who can charm, or can be very eloquent and persuasive; its etymology is the following: "a stone at Blarney castle near Cork in Ireland, said to give the gift of persuasive speech to anyone who kisses it".

In conclusion, this category of phraseological units implies a series of special features, which makes the adaptation of these units to the Romanian linguistic context a rather arduous job. Nevertheless, when the Romanian cultural context is called into question, the translator's efforts should be redoubled.

1.4.2. Phraseological units containing various places in the world

Other phraseological expressions can be characterized by the presence of different *places in the world*. There are two categories of such constructions:

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a) phraseological units where the respective place name is not preserved in the Romanian variant of translation.

The phraseological expression *The Dutch have taken **Holland**!* (NODE, p. 874) is used in our language with the meaning "mare scofală / procopseală" sau "a descoperi *America*". In this context, *Holland* appears as another name for *Netherlands*, "a former province of the Netherlands, comprising the coastal part of the country". As already noted, in order to render more precisely, into Romanian, the meaning of this phraseological unit, the name of a continent, *America*, is used, a place name that is more suggestive, instead of the name of a country, that is *Holland*, which occurs in the English variant.

a) phraseological units where the respective place name is preserved in both languages. The explanation is that, in this case, allusion is made to certain idiom deriving from proverbs that have an international character, due to the fact that they present an extensive circulation.

For example, the proverb *something is rotten in **Denmark*** (NODE, p. 493) has an international character because of the circulation of Shakespeare's plays, and is generally used to express the idea of a suspicion regarding certain facts. It is usually translated into Romanian as "ceva e putred in *Danemarca*". In this example, one can notice that the Romanian translation contains all the elements from the original structure, and the same place name is preserved.

The same pattern is also displayed by another phraseological unit, where the place name is used in both variants. English *to build castles in **Spain*** (DFRE, p. 77) is translated into Romanian as "a clădi castele in *Spania*". The name of the respective country appears in both expressions.

Besides these structures that are clearly defined, within this class of phraseological units that contain various places in the world, one may introduce another idiom, viz. *to see N**aples** and die* (NODE, p. 1230), implying that "after seeing *Naples*, one could have nothing left on earth to wish for".

1.4.3. Phraseological units containing places of classical character

There is also a category of phraseological expressions that is made up of *places of classical character.* This category includes certain proverbs that reflected realities from Antiquity, and they are classified as antique expressions, such as:

*When at **Rome,** do as the Romans do / **Rome** does* (NODE, p. 1611), which is translated into our language as "când treci prin ţara orbilor, închide şi tu un ochi". The place name is not mentioned in the Romanian translation and the meaning is that "when abroad or an unfamiliar environment you should adopt the customs or behaviour of those around you".

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Another phraseological expression that can be seen as forming part of this category is the following: *all roads lead to* ***Rome*** (NODE, p. 1611), which is translated by "toate drumurile duc la *Roma*", a proverb meaning that "there are different ways of reaching the same goal or conclusion".

Another proverb which contains the same place name is ***Rome*** *was not built in a day* (NODE, p.1611), meaning that "a complex task is bound to take a long time and should not be rushed"; it is used to warn against trying to achieve too much at once.

Conclusions

In conclusion, one is bound to make certain remarks concerning the possibility for such phraseological units to force, as it were, the translator to add some more cultural specificity to the way they are dealing with the SL text. In the first place, the expressions and phraseological units under study have proved to be extremely suggestive, and they have also illustrated a lot about their relative importance in both British and Romanian culture. Moreover, the present modest contribution has provided a mainly practical glimpse at the importance of idiom when learning a foreign language, since some place names seem fundamental to basic communication. Then, the examination of the set of proper names (and especially place names) selected have revealed interesting aspects about the capacity that a natural language has to achieve stylistic force; while their Romanian variants of translation have shown the complexity of these (mainly toponymical) structures.

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