HORSE IMAGES IN ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGY – STATUS AND IDENTITY

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Abstract: *Phraseology studies all word combinations having structural stability such as idioms, phrasal verbs, compounds, proverbs, sayings and other phraseological units. English phraseology is a complicated and vast mixture of fixed word-units of different types and styles. In structure and pattern, a part of them can be easily detected in other languages while some of them reflect a peculiar cultural background. Animal images appear in all types conveying a meaning which define nation's customs, traditions and prejudices, experiences and recollections from history and folktales. Mostly based on metaphors, picturesque and colourful they stand as real markers of linguistic and race identity as in the case of the horse-related phraseological combinations.*

Keywords: *phraseology, animal imagery, horse, metaphor, identity.*

Phraseology studies all word combinations having structural stability such as idioms, phrasal verbs, compounds, proverbs, sayings and other phraseological units. Phraseology is a kind of picture gallery in which are collected vivid and amusing sketches of the nation's customs, traditions and prejudices, recollections of its past history, fragments of folk songs and fairy-tales.

There is a close relationship between animals and people's lives. On the one hand, animals are the main source of food and clothing for humans; on the other hand, the different kinds of animals are associated by people with certain cultural images and patterns. That is why animal imagery in phraseology can clearly reflect the characteristics of a national culture.

Liao (2000) has defined that there are three bases to make animal vocabularies to cause cultural meanings. First, derive from animal's appearances, physical structure, mentality, behaviour. Second, come from cultural content such as fables, legends, religions, physical geography, and customs. Third, be created by association, that is to say, animals are associated with another things which relate to potential cultural psychology.

The widely known investigations of Elizabeth Piirainen (…..) suggested that the so-called "widespread" idioms with a similar lexical structure and figurative core meaning are well-developed in many European languages and hardly shared by minority languages, though a small number of idioms exist both in standard languages and in the lesser-used ones.

English phraseology is a complicated and vast mixture of fixed word-units of different types and styles. In structure and pattern, a part of them can be easily detected in other languages while some of them reflect a specific cultural background. Animal images appear in all types conveying a meaning which define nation's customs, traditions and prejudices, experiences and recollections from history and folktales. Mostly based on metaphors, picturesque and colourful they stand as real markers of linguistic and race identity. One can find animal images which are common to other languages: cat and dog, cattle, pig, horse and roosters among domestic ones and bear, wolf, fox and lion from the wild but also peculiar

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images and figures in this picture gallery: dark horses, white elephants, bulls in china shops and green-eyed monsters, bees in bonnets, bald coots, poor church mice and sheep's eyes.

Almost all cultures hold the horse in great esteem because it embodies power, freedom, endurance, nobility and elegance. In Great Britain the horse has been a tillable force, a warrior, a journey and a discovery companion to man. From the white horses, the ancients carved figures of giant horses into the chalk hills of southern England, to the early image of Queen Boudica in a chariot drawn by chargers, to Middle Ages farmers who were not only using pack horses, farm horses and cart horses, but were also breeding horses for saddling and driving, to Shakespeare's famous quotation" a horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse" (Richard the Third, act 5, scene 4, 7-10), to James Watt who based his famous measurement of power on the workhorse of the day – horsepower and to the Royal Horse Guards nowadays, the horse's contribution to Britain's rich history and culture is significant.

The horse may also have been responsible for influencing Britain's history when in October 1066, William the Duke of Normandy put his army, including 3,000 horses, onto 700 small sailing ships and headed across the channel to England. The English and Norman armies met near Hastings where William's army was victorious largely due to his cavalry assisted by archers. The Tapestry of Bayeux, describes the events and the importance of the horse is recorded by the fact that there are a total of 190 horses depicted on the tapestry itself.

"Ever since the first mounted man acquired extra stature and speed (…..), the horse has distinguished the ruler from the ruled. The man on horseback was the symbol of dominance and of no other class in the world was the horse so intrinsic a part of the English aristocracy (…).In 1895 the horse was still as inseparable from, and ubiquitous in, upper class life as the servant, though considerably more cherished. He provided locomotion, occupation and conversation; inspired love, bravery, poetry and physical prowess. He was the essential element in racing, the sport of kings, as in cavalry, the elite of war." (Tuchman, Barbara, 1998, p.50)

Accordingly, in English, the horse is frequently used in proverbs, sayings, idioms and in other expressions. Thus, it has had a prominent role in English culture and consequently there is a particularly large number of horse-related phraseological units, idioms, proverbs, compounds and other combinations.

Such proverbs such as: Don't put the cart before the horse, never look a gift-horse in the mouth are common to many cultures while others express British national customs, social reality, thinking mode and values:

You can ride a horse to the water but you cannot make him drink (Heywood, 1546); Don't swap horses in mid-stream: to make new plans or choose a new leader in an activity that has already begun; If wishes were horses, beggars would ride; It's too late to shut the stable-door when the horse is stolen A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse- used to indicate that the speaker needs no direct statement to understand the situation; When two ride on a horse, one must sit behind; One man may steal a horse, while another may not look over the hedge (old proverb given by Heywood in 1546); Wild horses wouldn't drag somebody-nothing would make a person give or reveal an information, do something; Stout horses and willing minds make short journeys in "She Stoops To Conquer" by Richard Sheridan.

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In the perspective of linguistics, most animal images used in idioms have figurative meaning. Idioms linked to animals usually contain metaphors. Animals denote and connote supposed qualities. These qualities are applied to people and human situations. (Moon, R., 1998, p.196).

To this respect many idioms containing the word horse have metaphorical meaning: to break a horse(in) : to discipline it; (straight) from the horse's mouth : get information from the person who knows it; to hold one's horses: to be patient, to wait, to hesitate; to frog a horse: to waste time and energy on something useless; to be on one's high horses: to insist on being treated with respect, to be arrogant; get off one`s high horse: to begin to be humble and agreeable; a horse of another colour: quite a different matter; a dark horse: a person whose abilities are undisclosed or concealed until revealed to the best advantage; back the wrong horse: support the loser in a contest; to bet on the wrong horse; to flog or beat a dead horse: trying to revive interest in a worn-out topic; to horse around: to play around (in a rough way); horses for courses: each person or thing being employed for the purpose for which he is most suited; a stalking-horse: an excuse; a willing horse is a good-natured and helpful person that everyone takes advantage of him or a person who works well and without complaint (Ridout and Witting, 1969, p.126) who also record a proverb Never spur a willing horse: with the meaning don't urge him to work harder and faster for he may then do less, or not be quite so willing; charley horse : a cramp, stiffness or spasm in a muscle- most often used for a muscle in the upper leg, particularly if caused by over-exertion - back in the 19th century, lame race-horses were called "Charley." Around the same time, old horses were used to drag the infield dirt at baseball stadiums. Whenever a ballplayer cramped up, they were compared to the grounds crew of limping equines - Charley horses; to sit a horse well/badly: to be a good/bad rider; wind the horses: to stop in order to rest the horses; every man with his hobby-horse: a subject about a man speaks of or complained very often; horse and foot: the cavalry and infantry hence all one's forces; hack: originally a term designating a horse hired out for short day rides, now commonly used to designate a taxi, which is also hired for short rides; getting a leg up: originally meant to assist someone in mounting, today it implies helping someone start a project; one-horse town: a small village of no consequence; she is getting a bit long in the tooth: horses get long in the tooth as they age; war horse: a person with a lot of experience in a field, especially a soldier or politician who has served for a long time, something (such as a work of art or musical composition) that has become very familiar because it has been played, shown, or seen many times, a large horse used in war; good old horse refers to something solid and loyal.

As in many other European cultures, a Trojan horse is something dangerous which is hidden inside something which appears safe or beneficial. The origin of the expression dates back to war between Greece and Troy in the mid-13th century BC, when the Greeks built a large wooden horse and left it outside the gates of Troy as an offering. The Greeks had hidden soldiers within the wooden horse, so when the Trojans brought the gift horse into their city, the soldiers came out at nightfall and opened the gates for the Greek army, allowing them to capture the city of Troy. A modern use of the expression is Trojan horse virus, which is a computer software virus which is hidden inside of useful software packages.

Horse latitudes are subtropical latitudes between 30 and 38 degrees both north and south, an area which receives little precipitation and has variable winds mixed with calm. A likely explanation is that the term is derived from the "dead

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horse" ritual of seamen. In this practice, the seaman paraded a straw-stuffed effigy of a horse around the deck before throwing it overboard. Seamen were paid partly in advance before a long voyage, and they frequently spent their pay all at once, resulting in a period of time without income. If they got advances from the ship's paymaster, they would incur debt. This period was called the "dead horse" time, and it usually lasted a month or two. The seaman's ceremony was to celebrate having worked off the "dead horse" debt. As west-bound shipping from Europe usually reached the subtropics at about the time the "dead horse" was worked off, the latitude became associated with the ceremony. (Kemp, Peter, The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea, London, Oxford University Press, 1976. pp. 233, 299)

An alternative theory, of sufficient popularity to serve as an example of folk etymology, is that the term horse latitudes originates from when the Spanish transported horses by ship to their colonies in the West Indies and Americas. Ships often became becalmed in mid-ocean in this latitude, thus severely prolonging the voyage; the resulting water shortages made it impossible for the crew to keep the horses alive, and they would throw the dead or dying animals overboard.

Numerous compounds have been built around the word horse - horse-box: closed vehicle for carrying horses, horse-tail, horsewhip, horsehair, horse-riding, horse-racing, horsemanship: art of riding, horseflesh: horses when they are described as something that people buy, train or sell for racing, horse-breaker, horse-dealer, on horseback, horsemeat, horse-radish: a plant, horse-chestnut: a large tree, vaulting horse, horse-power: to measure car engines(hp), horseshoe.

Horseshoes are believed to be a protection against witches and evil. They were nailed to the house doors with the two ends uppermost so that the luck did not flee. The story goes that Admiral Horatio Nelson had one nailed to the mast of Victory. One legend says that the Devil one day asked Saint Dunstan who was noted for his skill as a farrier, to shoe his single hoof. Dunstan knowing who his customer was tied him tightly to the wall and put the devil to such pain that he finally agreed to be released on condition that he would never enter a place where he saw a horseshoe displayed. (The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, 1993, p.549).

Combinations may have a poetical connotation- iron-horse: steam-engine or a pejorative one: a horse-milliner is one who makes up and supplies decorations for horses hence a horse-soldier is one who is not fit for the battlefield while the term; horse-marines is humorous and denotes an apparent absurdity.

As it has been shown, horses are also frequent constituents of various schemes of possession and ownership: for instance, the relationship between a master and his animal, buying and selling, stealing and swapping animals, the price and value of animals, the troubles accompanying the possession of animals (No horse, no problems).

Horse is often used with intensive effect: to eat like a horse: to eat a lot of food, work like a horse -- to work very hard, as strong as a horse, healthy as a horse

As the term has been associated with strength, largeness, or with something coarse, unrefined, a series of compounds suggest metaphorically such qualities - horse-fly: a large insect, horse-play: rough noisy fun or play, horse-laugh: loud, coarse laugh, horse-leech: person who eats a lot, horse-trading-hard, shrewd bargaining.

This lack of refinement is apparent in the way that language was formed. Any plant that resembled another but was large and coarser would be known as horse-plant name of choice: horse-daisy (country name for the Ox-eye Daisy), horse-

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radish (a large root resembling a radish but with a fiery taste), horse-gentian (Feverwort), horse-nettle (Nightshade); similarly, with reference to their physical appearance a human with long head has a horse face.

Horse-sense seems to go against the usual pattern since it denotes suggest ordinary wisdom, common sense, practical thinking. In fact, this expression means an unsophisticated, country type of sense by adding horse to sense.

Given the social importance of the horse in the English culture, saying about horses are numerous either produced by known people or by unknown ones. They underline the pleasure and emotions of riding and man's long connection to it. The horse is seen as the embodiment of beauty, freedom, power, wisdom, friendship: No hour of life is wasted that is spent in the saddle. ~Winston Churchill; A horse is the projection of peoples' dreams about themselves - strong, powerful, beautiful - and it has the capability of giving us escape from our mundane existence. ~Pam Brown; in riding a horse we borrow freedom. ~Helen Thomson, A canter is a cure for every evil. ~Benjamin Disraeli; wherever man has left his footprint in the long ascent from barbarism to civilization we will find the hoof print of the horse beside it. ~John Moore; to ride a horse is to ride the sky. ~Author Unknown; if you want a stable friendship, get a horse. ~Author Unknown; A horse is poetry in motion. ~Author Unknown; Life is like a wild horse. You ride it or it rides you. ~Author Unknown.

There a also numerous humorous sayings in which the second term of comparison is the horse: Boyfriends come and go, but horses are forever; Equestrian activity teaches young ladies to cope with large, friendly, but dumb creatures – the ideal training for marriage; Love is paying a £500 vet bill for a horse worth £50; When you fall of your horse, usually what's most hurt is your pride. If horse riding was easy, it would be called football; if you haven't fallen off a horse…then you haven't been riding long enough. Feeling down? Saddle up; I never fall off./ I just/Dismount with style, paraphrases to famous quotations : May the horse be with you! ; And on the seventh day … God went riding!; and even play upon words based on homophones: Seven days without a horse makes one weak; Whinnying is everything.

Britain has been a hugely important centre for thoroughbred racehorse breeding. All modern thoroughbred racehorses can be traced back to the late 17th/early 18th centuries and the General Stud Book first published by James Weatherby records details of every horse in the breed.

Horse racing is the second largest spectator sport in Great Britain and one of the longest established, with a history dating back many centuries part of British identity for hundreds of years.

The sport has taken place in the country since Roman times and many of the sport's traditions and rules originated there. The Jockey Club, established in 1750, codified the Rules of Racing. Britain is also home to some of the world's iconic racecourses including Newmarket, Ascot and Cheltenham. One of the most famous flat horse races in the world is the Epsom Derby while Royal Ascot is Britain's most valuable race meeting, attracting many of the world's finest racehorses to compete for more than £6.58milllion in prize money.

As a result, a lot of horse-racing terms entered spoken language: chomping at the bit : a horse chomps at the bit when he is eager to run, hence a person who is enthusiastic; in his stride: a racing term meaning a person is doing well; keeping a tight rein: maintaining tight control; left at the gate: a racing term implying that the person was left in confusion or fear at the beginning of a project;

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off to a good start: also a racing term meaning a project has begun well; spitting the bit out : quitting when tired and the job isn't done; colours refers to jockey's silk colours or to show your true character, just like in the song True colours sung by Cyndi Lauper.

The mare has its own idioms though less numerous than its companion: by shanks mare: by foot; money will make the mare go: if you have the money you can do everything as inspired by an old song: "Will you lend me your mare to go for a mile? / No, she is lame leaping over a stile. / But if you will her me to spare,/You shall have money for your mare./Oh ho! Say you so? /money will make the mare go." ;to win the mare or lose the galter: all or nothing; to look upon the mare's nest: an illusory discovery ; the grey mare is the better horse: about a wife who rules the house and bosses her husband while a stallion refers to a male who uses his masculinity.

In connection to these we may mention phrases and sayings having horse-related core words: spurs, saddle or cavalry. Consequently, to gain/win one's spurs: to gain the rank of knighthood, hence to win recognition of one's efforts, to show one's courage (for the first time also used by Shakespeare, "Let the boy win his spurs", a popular saying of Edward III of his son The Black Prince, at the Battle of Crecy); on the spur of the moment : without stopping to take thought; spur money: a small fine formerly imposed to those who entered church wearing spurs because of the interruption of the divine service by their ringing; spurred into action: forced to take action; spurring somebody or something on: enthusiastic support.

Saddle appears in structures like saddle up: begin an action; sold his saddle : meaning the person has quit a project; saddled with (a duty or obligation); to be in the saddle : to be in office; to be in a position of authority, to be ready for work; to set the saddle on the right horse: to lay the blame on those who deserve it; back-in-the-saddle: to resume one's duty; I will win the horse or lose the saddle: neck or nothing while to send in the cavalry means a last minute rescue.

Many British place names demonstrate horsey origins such as Horsley which means a "clearing or pasture for horses", Horsmonden "woodland pasture where horses drink" and Horsham, a Saxon name which is thought to mean "village where horses are kept." Numerous English place-names, such as Stadhampton, Stoodleigh and Studham, refer to the keeping of "studs", in this case herds of horses. Even toponyms from Old Norse like Hestwall meant horse or stallion.

Consequently, in English culture, horses were essential accompaniments to the way of life and apart from performing utilitarian functions, horses possessed iconic appeal and acquired status and identity. This reflected not only in the language as identity markers but also in the value that was placed on as well as in the role that horses played in society as a whole.

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