

# NON-COMPOSITIONALITY OF IDIOMS IN A MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT [WG1, WG3]



Katalin Ilona Simkó<sup>1</sup>, Veronika Vincze<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Szeged

<sup>2</sup>MTA-SZTE Research Group on Artificial Intelligence  
simko@hung.u-szeged.hu; vinczev@inf.u-szeged.hu



## Introduction

- idioms are non-compositional, which makes them hard to translate
- different groups of idioms between language pairs based on translatability
- English-Hungarian database with five groups of idioms

### Group 1: Same structure, same meaning

- idiom is present in both source and target languages with same lexical and syntactic make-up
- idiom has the same meaning in both languages
- translatable as if it wasn't an idiom

in a nutshell - dióhéjban (*nutshell-INE*)  
to break the ice - megtöri a jeget (*PERF.break.PRES.3SG the ice.ACC*)

### Group 2: Partial change in structure, same meaning

- idiom is present in both source and target languages with either lexical or syntactic make-up difference
- idiom has the same meaning in both languages

pot calling the kettle black - bagoly mondja verébnek, hogy nagy fejű (*owl.NOM say.PRES.3SG house sparrow.DAT, that big headed*)  
one's bark is worse than one's bite - amelyik kutya ugat, az nem harap (*the dog.NOM bark.PRES.3SG, that not bite-PRES.3SG*)

### Group 3: Different structure, same meaning

- idiom is present in both source and target languages with different lexical and syntactic make-up
- idiom has the same meaning in both languages

let the grass grow under one's feet - megalszik a tej a szájában (*PERF.curdle.PRES.3SG the milk.NOM the mouth.POSS3SG.INE*)  
count one's chickens before they hatch - előre iszik a medve bőrére (*in advance drink.PRES.3SG the bear.NOM skin.POSS3SG.SUB*)

### Group 4: Same structure, different meaning

- idiom with same lexical and syntactic make-up is present in both source and target languages
- idiom has different meaning in the languages
- very rare

jumps out of one's skin - majd kiugrik a bőréből (*almost out.jump.PRES.3SG the skin-POSS3SG-ELA*)

### Group 5: No equivalent idiom

- the meaning expressed by an idiom in the source language cannot be expressed idiomatically in the target language

penny-wise, but pound-foolish  
nem erőszak a disznótör (*no force the pig-slaughterer.NOM - "you are free to refrain from an invitation"*)

## Database

- 944 idioms from website for Hungarians learning English ([sulinet.hu/nyelvek/?nyelv=angol](http://sulinet.hu/nyelvek/?nyelv=angol))

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
165	129	587	5	58
17.5%	13.5%	62%	0.5%	6%

## Future work

- add corpus data
- expand to more languages