

Idiom variation in English and Croatian

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INTRODUCTION

- A number of idioms have a fairly flexible structure (Moon 1998; Langlotz 2006).
- Similar types of idiom variation occur in different European languages, for example English (Nunberg, Sag and Wasow 1994), Croatian (Parizoska 2009), Italian (Cignoni and Coffey 1998), Russian (Dobrovol'skij 2007).
 - E.g. lexical substitution, adnominal modification and perspectival variants.
- Idiom variation is dependent on and constrained by cognitive mechanisms (Gibbs and Nayak 1989; Gibbs et al. 1989).
 - The CONTAINER and SOURCE-PATH-GOAL image schemas in English and Croatian idioms with the structure VP + *into* / *u* ('in') + NP.
 - *fall into someone's clutches*
 - *baciti koga u vatru* (lit. throw someone into the fire 'make someone deal with a difficult situation without preparing them for it')
- Corpus data show that these idioms undergo similar types of changes, e.g. transitive and intransitive constructions.
 - *drive someone into someone's clutches*
 - *ići u vatru* (lit. go into the fire 'deal with a difficult situation without being prepared for it')
- Given the universality of mechanisms motivating idioms (Kövecses 2005), it can be assumed that there are some general patterns underlying idiom variation in English and Croatian.

AIM

- To show that the same types of variation of English and Croatian idioms with the structure VP + *into* / *u* ('in') + NP have similar properties.

METHODOLOGY

- 190 idioms with the structure VP + *into* / *u* + NP
 - 73 English and 117 Croatian idioms
- A study of the idioms in the British National Corpus and the Croatian National Corpus.
- Search: occurrences of the pattern *into* / *u* and a NP or two NPs within a span of 5 words.
 - E.g. *hat* and *ring* in *throw your hat into the ring*

RESULTS

- The same types of variation have similar features in English and Croatian.
- Focus on three types: lexical substitution, adnominal modification and perspectival variants.

Lexical substitution

- Verb variation is constrained by the situation conceptualized as the location.
- It may be restricted to items describing manner of motion.
 - E.g. *go into overdrive* also occurs as *leap into overdrive*.

Adnominal modification

- Common variation type: premodification by adjective.
- Language-specific variation:
 - English: premodification by noun and postmodification by an *of*-phrase.
 - Croatian: postmodification by a genitive noun.

RESULTS cont.

- Modifiers have the same function: they qualify properties and relations (Radden and Dirven 2007: 114).
- The *of*-phrase in English and genitive nouns in Croatian specify the target domain expressed by the noun.
 - *retreat into a shell of indifference*
 - *gurati u vatru utakmice* (lit. push someone into the fire of the match 'force someone to play in the match')

Perspectival variants

- Idioms vary systematically relative to the relation between a trajector and a location expressed by the PP.
 - Self-motion (*come into play*) or caused motion (*bring into play*)

Language-specific variation

- English relies on position.
 - *turn swords into ploughshares*
 - *swords turned into ploughshares*
- Croatian relies on inflection.
 - *staviti ruku u vatru* (lit. put your hand into the fire 'be absolutely sure')
 - *ne može se staviti ruka u vatru* (lit. your hand cannot be put into the fire 'you cannot be absolutely sure')

DISCUSSION

- Similar variation types and language-specific variation are both subject to a general constraint: recoverability.
- What remains unchanged is an idiom's conceptual core (Langlotz 2006: 277) – a syntactic pattern containing the minimum number of lexical items which reflect the mappings that are the basis of idiomatic meaning.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

- Idiom variation in English and Croatian reflects global constraints.
- Lexical items and grammatical structures are symbolic in nature (Langacker 2008), which could mean that similar idiom variation constraints exist in different languages.
- Contrastive analysis of other language pairs should be undertaken to shed more light on the properties of idiom variation types and their functions in different languages.

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