

# Phraseology in Harry Potter Books and Their Croatian Translations

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Preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i mađarskog jezika i  
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Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Goran Schmidt

Osijek, 2021.

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## **Abstract**

Phraseology is “the way in which language is used, especially in the choice of words and expressions” (Cambridge Dictionary). It studies set or fixed expressions, such as idioms, phrasal verbs, etc. in which the words are combined in a particular way in order to give a certain meaning to an expression. The more we know about the phraseology of a certain language, the easier it is for us to understand it and use it in everyday life. In addition, it offers a possibility to play with words and speak figuratively. This research is based on the analysis of expressions used by the characters in Harry Potter movies, and their translation into the Croatian language. The reason why this particular series of films is used for the corpus of this BA thesis is that each movie is filled with numerous metaphorical expressions that can enrich the viewers’ vocabulary and, on multiple occasions, make them burst into laughter. This BA thesis is constructed in a way that it has a number of idioms listed chronologically (that is, as they appear in the films). The idioms are defined, explained, exemplified, and translated or paraphrased into Croatian.

Keywords: phraseology, idiom, English, Croatian, translation

Abbreviations used:

CD - Cambridge Dictionary

FD - The Free Dictionary by Farlex

OD - Oxford Dictionaries

*Stone* – Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone

*Chamber* – Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

*Prisoner* – Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

*Goblet* – Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

*Order* – Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

*Prince* – Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

*Hallows 1* – Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows 1

*Hallows 2* – Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows 2



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# 1 Introduction

Every language that exists has its own special way of constructing sentences. In order to construct sentences, we need to know the meaning of words in a certain language. The more words that we are familiar with, the more coherent our sentences will be. However, we are not truly familiar with the beauty of a language until we manage to put together seemingly random words that, on their own, have no significant meaning, but together create a unit that is used as a figurative expression. These expressions are part of a study of language called phraseology. Phraseology is important for every language because it enriches the vocabulary and gives a finishing touch to it. One of the most prominent research areas of phraseology is idioms, and this paper will provide a list of idioms with their in-depth analysis.

This research includes the analysis of idioms from the Harry Potter movie series in the source language – English, and their translation in the target language – Croatian. It includes a collection of 40 idioms from all of the eight movies (5 idioms from each movie).

The paper is divided into 3 parts, from which the first one will serve to explain the aim of the paper and the research design. The second part is focused on the theoretical background in order to explain phraseology and phraseological units, while focusing on idioms. Finally, the third part will consist of the analysis of the expressions chosen from the movies and it will be followed by the conclusion.

## 1.1. Aim of the paper

This paper analyzes the phraseology of the Harry Potter film series. The aim of this paper is to analyze the idioms that are used in all of the eight films and to provide their explanation, and translation or equivalent in the Croatian language. The paper will also serve to observe how many of the listed idioms can be translated into Croatian literally, that is, it will show whether or not the majority of the listed idioms have a Croatian equivalent.

## 1.2. Research design

In this paper, a number of 40 idioms have been taken from the HP film series, in chronological order, and are analyzed (definition, example, and translation or equivalent).

## 2 Theoretical background

For a better understanding of the research, this section briefly covers the theoretical background as described by Sabine Fiedler in her book *English phraseology, a coursebook* (Fiedler 2007).

### 2.1 Phraseology and phraseological units

Phraseology is defined both as a study of phraseological units, and a language's inventory of phrases and idioms (Fiedler 2007: 15). A phraseological unit (also referred to as PU) is a polylexemic item that consists of at least two independent words and it is conventionalized in content and structure (Fiedler 2007: 17). Phraseology studies such types of multi-word lexical units whose meaning is more specific or not predictable from the sum of the meanings of the words included. Also, phraseology explains the main characteristics of phraseological units such as polylexemic structure (Fiedler 2007: 17); stability (stable semantic and syntactic structure of PU) (Fiedler 2007: 19); lexicalization (PU is retained in the collective memory of a language community) (Fiedler 2007: 21); idiomaticity (the meaning of an expression is difficult or impossible to derive from the meanings of the constituents) (Fiedler 2007: 22); connotations (used to put more emphasis on the speaker's or writer's intention) (Fiedler 2007: 23); transformational deficiencies (e.g. resisting syntactic transformations such as passivization) (Fiedler 2007: 26).

### 2.2 Idioms and idiomaticity

The term idiom can be used in different ways. Some of these are:

1. The form of speech peculiar or proper to a people or country; own language or tongue,
2. In narrower sense: the variety of a language which is peculiar to a limited district or class of people, dialect. The specific character, property or genius of any language; the manner of expressions which is natural or peculiar to it. (Fiedler 2007:15)

Idiomaticity describes “the common phenomenon that the meaning of an expression is difficult or even impossible to derive from the meanings of the constituents it is composed of” (Fiedler 2007: 22).

This is quite a bit of a problem for foreign learners because they often fail to recognize the connotative meaning of the PU, such as to tease somebody in the expression “to pull somebody’s leg” while they immediately recognize the denotative meanings of the constituents ‘pull’ and ‘leg’ (Fiedler 2007: 22).

### 2.3. Translating PU’s

“Translation is defined as the cognitive and linguistic process the translator performs in decoding a text which is the result of a communication act in the source language and in encoding it as speech product in the target language by preserving the content and achieving the stylistic quality of the source language text” (Gläser 1984:123).

A special text-translation is required when translating phraseology, since “the PU must be identified as a peculiar translation, and understood with its figurative meaning and relative stability” (Fiedler 2007: 117). Every language has its PU’s, but it is almost impossible to find two languages that have a high percentage of equivalence. This is why translating PU’s is a complex process.

Because of the characteristics of PUs (i.e. their idiomaticity, stability, polylexicality and often figurative meaning), it is sometimes very hard to preserve the original connotation of an expression.

Fiedler (2007: 120) suggests a certain order in the process of translating PUs:

- 1) identification of the PU in the source language
- 2) analysis of the phraseological meaning (SL paraphrase)
- 3) translation of the phraseological meaning (TL paraphrase)
- 4) substitution by a PU in the target language

### 3 Analysis

All of the translations used in the analysis are my own.

#### (1) There, there

“There, there, Hagrid.” (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*)

According to Cambridge Dictionary, this idiom is used to tell someone not to be worried or unhappy. There is no Croatian equivalent for this sentence, so it must be paraphrased.

For example, in Croatian we can say: “*Ne brini, Hagrid.*” (This means: “Don’t worry Hagrid”).

#### (2) Funny business

Used for “dishonest actions or behaviour intended to trick someone” (CD). This can be translated into Croatian as “*glupiranje*”, but that is not an equivalent.

“I’m warning you, no funny business!” (*Stone*)

In Croatian we can say: “*Upozoravam te, bez glupiranja!*”

#### (3) Behind schedule

This means “moving slower or happening later than the planned time” (CD). The Croatian translation would be “*zaostati*” or “*kasniti*”, but it is not an equivalent to the English idiom.

“We’re a bit behind schedule.” (*Stone*)

In Croatian we can say: “*Malo zaostajemo.*”

#### (4) “A hand-me-down”

The idiom “hand-me-down” represents “a piece of clothing that someone has given to a younger person because they no longer want it” (CD). In most cases, it is used when an older sibling passes on a piece of clothing to a younger sibling. In Croatian, there is no equivalent, we can only use a description, for example: “*staro*”.

“A hand-me-down robe, you must be a Weasley!” (*Stone*)

In Croatian we can say: “*Plać od starijeg brata, mora da si Weasley!*”

#### (5) Dumb luck

In other words, this idiom represents the term “pure chance”, and it has a Croatian equivalent which is, “*puka sreća*”.

“Ten points each, for sheer, dumb luck.” (*Stone*)

In Croatian it means; “*Deset bodova za svakog od vas, zbog puke sreće.*”

#### (6) A toe out of line

To put a toe out of line means “not to follow the accepted ideas and behavior” (CD). There is no Croatian equivalent for this idiom. We can say “*neposlušno*” or “*ne pridržavanje*” in Croatian.

“If you put another toe out of line, you will be sent straight home!” (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*)

In Croatian we can say; “*Ne budeš li se pridržavao pravila bit ćeš poslan ravno kući!*”

#### (7) Buy someone’s way in

This means “to achieve entry or membership in something often by paying money” (CD). In Croatian we can literally say the same thing, which is “*kupiti nečiji put*” or “*kupiti nečiji ulaz*”, depending on the context.

“At least Harry didn’t have to buy his way in.” (*Chamber*)

A suggested translation: *“Harry barem nije morao kupiti svoj ulaz.”*

#### (8) Time flies

This idiom is used as an observation that time seems to pass very quickly. It has a Croatian equivalent which is *“vrijeme leti”*.

*“It’s crazy how the time flies when one’s having so much fun!” (Chamber)*

A suggested translation: *“Suludo je koliko vrijeme leti kad se zabavljaš!”*

#### (9) Heart of a lion

According to Cambridge Dictionary, to say that someone has the heart of a lion (or is lion-hearted) means that he or she is very brave. The Croatian equivalent for it is *“biti lavljeg srca”*.

*“Heart of a lion this one.” (Chamber)*

A suggested translation: *“Ovaj je baš lavljeg srca.”*

#### (10) To keep an eye on someone

According to Oxford Dictionaries, this idiom means to ‘keep under careful observation’. It has a Croatian equivalent which is *“držati na oku”*.

*“He certainly kept an eye on me after that.” (Chamber)*

A suggested translation: *“Definitivno me nakon toga držao na oku.”*

#### (11) Don't let the grass grow under one's feet

This expression means to ‘act now, don’t delay’ (FD). It does not have a Croatian equivalent. The literal translation would be *“nemoj čekati da ti trava naraste pod nogama”* which is not usually said in a conversation. For ‘don’t delay’, the translation is *“nemoj odugovlačiti”*.

“Let’s not wait for the grass to grow.” (*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*)

A suggested translation: “*Nemojmo odugovlačiti.*”

#### (12) Long face

“If you have a long face, you look sad” (CD). In Croatian, we don’t use the term “*dugo lice*” because it does not have the same meaning as in English, but we can say “*tmurno lice*”, which means “a sad face”.

“Why the long faces?” (*Prisoner*)

A suggested translation: “*Čemu tmurna lica?*”

#### (13) Lay it on thick

To ‘lay it on thick’ means to ‘Exaggerate, overstate; also, flatter effusively’ (CD). There is no Croatian equivalent for this expression, we simply say “*pretjerivati*”, which means “to exaggerate”.

“He’s really laying it on thick, isn’t he?” (*Prisoner*)

A suggested translation: “*Uistinu pretjeruje, zar ne?*”

#### (14) Rumor has it

This idiom is used when ‘it is being rumored that (something is or will be the case)’ (FD). The Croatian equivalent for this idiom is “*šuška se*”.

“Rumor has it he’s somewhere in the castle.” (*Prisoner*)

A suggested translation: “*Šuška se da je negdje u dvorcu.*”

#### (15) Out in the open



This idiom can have two meanings; “1 (Exposed and visible to others in an open space or area.), and 2 (By extension, available for public viewing, participation, or experience.)” (FD). The Croatian translation for the first case is “*biti vani na otvorenome*”, and the second can be translated as “*dostupno je svima*” or “*otkriveno je*”, depending on the context.

“It’s out in the open for everyone to see.” (*Prisoner*)

A suggested translation: “*Otkriveno je i dostupno svima.*”

(16) Haven’t the foggiest

This expression is “used to say that a person has no knowledge about something” (FD). The Croatian partial equivalent would be “*nemam blagog pojma*” or (in slang) “*nemam blage*”.

“Dad, where are we going? – Haven’t the foggiest son.” (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*)

A suggested translation: “*Tata, gdje idemo? – Nemam blage, sine.*”

(17) Put one’s best foot forward

This expression means to “embark on an undertaking with as much effort and determination as possible” (CD). In Croatian, there is no equivalent, so we must paraphrase; “*dati sve od sebe*”.

“I want you to put your best foot forward for this dance.” (*Goblet*)

A suggested translation: “*Želim da za ovaj ples date sve od sebe.*”

(18) Bottoms up

This expression is used as a toast or to tell people to finish their drinks. The Croatian translation can be “*do dna!*” or “*na eks!*”, which is partially equivalent.

“Bottoms up!” (*Goblet*)

A suggested translation: “*Do dna!*”

(19) ‘You want a piece of me?’

‘You want a piece of me?’ is a very confrontational thing to say. ‘They’re basically asking if another person (or people) want to fight them. It tends to be said by a very confident person who wants the other person to know they’re more than willing to solve things violently.’ (FD) The Croatian equivalent is frequently used: ‘*Želiš li djelić/komadić mene?*’.

‘You want a piece of me, Malfoy?!’ (*Goblet*)

A suggested translation: ‘*Želiš li djelić mene, Malfoy?!*’

(20) Out of one’s mind

According to Cambridge Dictionary, the definition of ‘out of one’s mind’ is : not sane :crazy. The Croatian translation is ‘*izvan sebe*’.

‘I’m out of my mind!’ (*Goblet*)

A suggested translation: ‘*Izvan sebe sam!*’

(21) Sink in

‘If an unpleasant or surprising fact or idea sinks in, you gradually start to believe it, understand it, or realize the effect it will have on you’ (CD). In Croatian we can say ‘*upiti informaciju*’ or ‘*pustiti da sjedne*’.

‘You will write it for as long as it takes for the message to sink in.’ (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*)

A suggested translation: ‘*Pisat ćeš dokle god bude potrebno toj poruci da ti sjedne.*’

(22) Range of a teaspoon

The actress Emma Watson (who portrays Hermione in HP), improvised one of her scenes by using this idiom. By using the term “range of a teaspoon”, she wanted to emphasize the small amount of something (in this scene case, Ron’s emotions).

“Just because you have the emotional range of a teaspoon.” (*Order*)

It can be literally translated into Croatian: “*Samo zato što ti imaš raspon emocija veličine čajne žličice.*”

(23) A firm hand

“If someone needs a firm hand, they need to be controlled in a strict way” (CD). This PU has a Croatian equivalent and it is “*čvrsta ruka*”.

“He just needs a firm hand, that’s all.” (*Order*)

A suggested translation: “*Sve što mu treba je čvrsta ruka.*”

(24) To stand a chance

To stand a chance means “to have a chance of success” (CD). In Croatian, we can’t say “*stajati šansu*” (which would be the literal translation), instead we say “*imati šansu*”, which means; “to have a chance”.

“Did you actually think you stood a chance against us?” (*Order*)

A suggested translation: “*Jeste li zaista mislili da imate šanse protiv nas?*”

(25) To come through

This means “to succeed in a difficult situation” (CD). In Croatian there is no equivalent, we simply say “*uspjeti*”.

“Don’t worry, he’ll come through.” (*Order*)

A suggested translation: “*Ne brini, uspijet će.*”

(26) Empty words

Empty words/gestures/promises etc. are words that are not sincere, or have no effect. There is a Croatian equivalent which is ‘prazne riječi, obećanja..’.

“He is not to be trusted, those are just empty words.” (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*)

A suggested translation: ‘*Ne treba mu vjerovati, to su samo prazne riječi.*’

(27) To carry out the deed

“To perform or undertake any given action, usually implied to be unpleasant, unsavory, or illegal” (FD). In Croatian, there is an expression: ‘*izvršiti radnju*’.

“He ought to carry out the deed the Dark Lord has ordered him to perform.” (*Prince*)

A suggested translation: ‘*Mora izvršiti radnju koju mu je naredio Gospodar Tame.*’

(28) Money spinner

This PU stands for ‘a product, business, or idea that makes a lot of money’ (CD). There is no Croatian equivalent, so we must paraphrase it: ‘*donosi veliku zaradu*’.

“A real money-spinner that one.” (*Prince*)

A suggested translation: ‘*Taj nam donosi veliku zaradu.*’

(29) Barking

This term is used when someone is being ‘crazy or extremely silly’ (CD). There is no Croatian equivalent, since ‘*lajati*’ in Croatian means ‘to swear’, which is a different thing.

“You’re barking!” (*Prince*)

A suggested translation: ‘*Šališ se!*’

(30) A sober fact

“You say that something is a sobering thought or has a sobering effect when a situation seems serious and makes you become serious and thoughtful” (FD). In Croatian, the term that is used is “*surova činjenica*”. This is partially equivalent.

“However, we must not forget the sober fact that the Dark Lord has returned.” (*Prince*)

A suggested translation: “*Ne smijemo zaboraviti na surovu činjenicu da se Gospodar Tame vratio.*”

(31) Turn something over

This expression means to “to steal something from a place or to search it, making it very messy or causing damage” (CD). In Croatian, we can use the word “*preturiti*”.

“When you turned this place over, you found a locket, didn’t you?” (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows I*)

A suggested translation; “*Kada si preturao ovo mjesto, našao si medaljon, zar ne?*”

(32) Spit something out

To “spit something out” is used to urge someone to say or confess something quickly. When it is translated into Croatian, it means “*ispljuni*”, but this is not used in conversation. This idiom has to be paraphrased.

“Spit it out, don’t be shy.” (*Hallows I*)

A suggested translation: “*Hajde reci, nemoj se sramiti.*”

(33) Living up to someone’s expectations

This means ‘to be as good as or have the qualities that someone predicted, expected, or hoped for’ (FD). In Croatian, we say: ‘*opravdati nečija očekivanja*’.

‘Oh, I’m sorry. Which part of this isn’t living up to your expectations?’ (*Hallows 1*)

A suggested translation: ‘*Oh, oprosti. Koji dio ovoga ne opravdava tvoja očekivanja?*’

(34) To come around

This idiom means to ‘to start to accept and support (something, such as an idea) after opposing it: to stop opposing or disagreeing with (something)’ (CD). The Croatian version is: ‘*doći (k) sebi: opametiti se, osvijestiti (se)*’.

‘Keep talking to her like and she’ll come around.’ (*Hallows 1*)

A suggested translation: ‘*Nastavi pričati s njom I doći će k sebi.*’

(35) Wouldn’t hurt a fly

This expression is used when we want to say that someone is ‘too gentle to want to hurt anyone’ (CD). The Croatian equivalent is: ‘*ne bi ni mrava zgazio*’.

‘I know her, she wouldn’t hurt a fly.’ (*Hallows 1*)

A suggested translation: ‘*Poznajem ju, ona ne bi mogla ni mrava zgaziti.*’

(36) All hell breaks loose

This informal PU is ‘used to describe what happens when violent, destructive, and confused activity suddenly begins’ (CD). There is no Croatian equivalent. We can use the term ‘*izmaknuti kontroli*’ to describe a situation when a person loses control over an activity.

‘We plan, we get there, all hell breaks loose.’ (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows 2*)

A suggested translation: ‘*Planiramo, stignemo, sve se izmakne kontroli.*’

(37) Hold the fort

To ‘hold the fort’ means to ‘take responsibility for a situation while another person is temporarily absent’ (CD). The Croatian version of this idiom is ‘*držati kormilo*’ or ‘*držati uzde*’, which is partially equivalent to the English PU.

‘Hold the fort, Neville.’ (*Hallows 2*)

A suggested translation: ‘*Drži uzde, Neville,*’

(38) Beyond help

This idiom is used ‘at a point where nothing can be done to make things better’ (CD). The Croatian equivalent is ‘*izvan nečije moći*’.

‘That is something beyond our help Harry.’ (*Hallows 2*)

A suggested translation: ‘*To je nešto što je izvan naše moći, Harry.*’

(39) Take something into account

This idiom means to ‘consider something along with other factors before reaching a decision’ (CD). The Croatian equivalent is: ‘*uzeti nešto u obzir*’.

‘The Sorting Hat takes your choice into account.’ (*Hallows 2*)

A suggested translation: ‘*Razredbeni klobuk uzima tvoj izbor u obzir.*’

(40) Get (one’s) knickers in a knot

This idiom means to ‘become overly upset or emotional over something’ (CD). There is no Croatian equivalent, so we simply translate it into: ‘*uzrujati se*’.

‘What?! It’s not my fault she’s got her knickers in a knot.’ (*Hallows 2*)

A suggested translation: ‘*Što je?! Nije moja krivica što je uzrujana.*’

## **4 Conclusion**

This research is based on 40 English idioms from the Harry Potter movie series and their translations into the Croatian language. The paper shows how the equivalence of English and Croatian idioms is almost split into half. Both languages are rich with amusing PU's. However, both languages have their own unique versions of PU's and cannot always be identical; in most translating occasions, paraphrasing is necessary. In addition, some phraseological units can be translated literally since their meaning is obvious.

There are 40 idioms presented in this research, from which 18 idioms are equivalent in English and Croatian, 13 are not equivalent (they had to be paraphrased in order to be understood in the targeted language – Croatian), and 9 idioms that are left are only partially equivalent in both languages.

Every language has its own unique way of constructing PU's. The most important thing when it comes to translating PU's is not that we use the exact translation of each word that the PU contains, but that we find a word in the targeted language which will get the message through.



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