

# Phraseology in Popular English Language TV Shows and Series and their Croatian Translations

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Marijana Kunac

**Frazemi u popularnim TV emisijama i serijama na engleskom jeziku i  
njihovim hrvatskim prijevodima**

Završni rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Goran Schmidt

Osijek, 2021.

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**Prilog: Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti i o suglasnosti za javno objavljivanje**

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## Abstract

Phraseology is one of the most important parts of any language. English and Croatian are no exception to this rule. This is why this research is based on phraseological units, their meanings, usage, and translation. The phraseological units used in this research are from the popular TV series *How I Met Your Mother* and *Two and a Half Men*. I chose *How I Met Your Mother* and *Two and a Half Men* because both are highly comedic, as well as popular and interesting. Both TV series use everyday language and contain a lot of phraseological units. As such, they are a great representation of phraseological units' undeniable importance in language.

This research is based on 30 phraseological units, 19 from *How I Met Your Mother* and 11 from *Two and a Half Men*. These phraseological units are analyzed in more detail in the second part of this research. This detailed analysis includes their definition from one of the dictionaries, an example sentence (from a dictionary or from the TV series itself), and a translation into the target language, Croatian. The translation was found in *Hrvatsko - engleski frazeološki rječnik*. When the translation could not be found, a paraphrase of the idiom was given.

This bachelor's thesis consists of 3 major parts. The first part will focus on theory, terminology, and definitions on phraseology since it is crucial to understand them in order to understand the ultimate aim of this research. The second part is the detailed analysis, and the third part is a concise conclusion of the whole research.

Keywords: TV series, English, Croatian, phraseology, idioms, phraseological units, translation, language

Abbreviations used:

AHDI - The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms

BFHJ - *Baza frazema hrvatskog jezika*

CaOD - Cambridge Online Dictionary

CoOD - Collins Online Dictionary

FD - The Free Dictionary by Farlex

G - Glosbe

HEFR - *Hrvatsko - engleski frazeološki rječnik*

HIMYM - How I Met Your Mother

HJP - Hrvatski Jezični portal

MWD - Merriam-Webster Dictionary

OD - Oxford Dictionaries

UD - Urban Dictionary

TAAHM - Two and a Half Men



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## 1 Introduction

The research of this bachelor paper is based on the phraseological units from the TV series *How I Met Your Mother* and *Two and a Half Men* and their translation into Croatian. Phraseological units are “a word group with a fixed lexical composition and grammatical structure” (FD) and they are an interesting research topic since “its meaning, which is familiar to native speakers of the given language, is generally figurative and cannot be derived from the meanings of the phraseological unit’s component parts” (FD). Due to their figurative meaning, translating the phraseological units can be really hard and it represents one of the most demanding tasks when it comes to translating. This is why this research deals with translating phraseological units from their source language, English, into the target language, Croatian. Sometimes, Croatian provides an equivalent for the phraseological unit, but when it is not possible, a paraphrase of the phraseological unit is proposed.

The phraseological units are the center of this research, but the paper consists of three major parts. The first part covers the theoretical background on phraseology, which is necessary to comprehend the fact that phraseological units are indispensable. The second, and the most important part, is a detailed analysis of the chosen phraseological units. The analysis includes a phraseological unit, its definition, and a translation into Croatian. The last part of this research is a brief conclusion that rounds up the whole research and its main ideas.

## 2 Theoretical background

Phraseological units are deeply rooted in a language as people use them every day in various situations. The phraseological units can be used both formally and informally, but either way, they enrich our possibilities when it comes to expressing. As I already mentioned, phraseological units are used frequently, in many situations and occasions, but not everybody can define what they really are, or what phraseology is. This is why it is crucial to explain some basic terms revolving around phraseology and phraseological units.

### 2.1. Phraseology

“The term ‘phraseology’ can be used, firstly, to name the field of study (phraseology research) and, secondly, to denote the set of linguistic units that are investigated in this field. The latter consists of phraseological units, which constitute the phrasicon, i.e. the block or inventory of idioms and phrases” (Fiedler, 2007: 15). Phraseological units are sometimes called idioms, but Fiedler warns that these two are not synonyms since the word “idiom” is used for other purposes. Also, terms such as cliché, fixed expression, saying, proverb, multi-word lexeme, routine formula, phraseme, and set phrase are used synonymously with phraseological unit. But Fiedler emphasizes that “phraseological unit” is the best choice since it is accepted globally: “the term PU has equivalents in many languages, such as *unite phraséologique* in French, *phraseologische Einheit* in German, *frazeološka jedinica* in Croatian” (ibid.).

### 2.2. Main characteristics of a phraseological unit

It is also important to know what differentiates phraseological units from some other random word combinations. There are four important criteria: polylexemic structure, idiomaticity, lexicalization, and relative stability.

#### 2.2.1. Polylexemic structure

“PUs are polylexemic items, i.e. they consist of at least two independent words” (Fiedler, 2007: 17). This is explained by Fiedler to be controversial criterion since some PUs can be transformed into a compound; for example, *to pull the wires* can be turned into a one word, *wire-puller*.

### 2.2.2. Relative Stability

The second criterion is stability. This is explained by Fiedler to be “the key feature which makes PU distinctive from a random combination of words as a syntagma” (Fiedler, 2007; 19). This is exemplified with the fact that a phraseological unit *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush* is only acceptable with this order of words since *\*a sparrow in the hand is worth two in the bush* is not a valid phraseological unit.

However, sometimes the spelling or the prepositions vary. This is why this is called relative stability. For example, phraseological units *under the rug* and *under the carpet* are accepted as synonyms.

### 2.2.3. Lexicalization

Lexicalization describes the fact that phraseological units are accepted and used by a lot of people; or “retained in the collective memory of a language community” (Fiedler, 2007; 21). Essentially, this means that people memorize phraseological units as a whole and use them in various occasions.

### 2.2.4. Idiomaticity

“Idiomaticity is the term used to describe 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). Idiomaticity is what makes phraseological units difficult to translate and understand to non-native speakers.

### 3 Research design

This research consists of 30 randomly chosen phraseological units from the popular TV series *How I Met Your Mother* and *Two and a Half Men* in their source language English, and their translation into the target language Croatian. The analysis includes a phraseological unit, its definition from one of the dictionaries, an example sentence in English, as well as the possible translation of the phraseological unit into Croatian. The translation of phraseological units is from *Hrvatsko - engleski frazeološki rječnik*. When a translation could not be found, a paraphrase of the phraseological unit is proposed.

#### 3.1. The Aim

This research is based on 30 phraseological units and their translation into Croatian. The ultimate aim of this research is to show how phraseological units make up a large part of any language. Another aim is to show how the translation of phraseological unit functions since the translators often have trouble finding the appropriate paraphrase.

### 4 Translation of phraseological units

“Translation is understood as the complex process of transferring a text from a source language (SL) into a communicatively adequate and equivalent text in a target language (TL) which meets all communicative requirements” (Fiedler, 2007: 117).

However, “as for phraseology, the translator’s decision depends on the (non)existence of an equivalent in the target language” (Fiedler, 2007: 118). Sometimes, languages do not share a phraseological unit and “a translator can apply various procedures, including commenting paraphrase, omission, permutation, and compensation” (ibid).

## Analysis

The first part of the analysis deals with the phraseological units from *How I Met Your Mother*. The first five phraseological units are the most common within the series, they are frequently used by the characters from the series, and are therefore necessary to mention. Other phraseological units from the series are not so common within the series, but they appear and contribute to the series' plot and satire.

### *How I Met Your Mother*

#### 1. True story

“I ate six Big Macs for lunch yesterday. True story” (UD).

“A phrase made popular by Barney Stinson in the TV show *How I Met Your Mother*, it either attempts to make a ridiculous story more believable or indicates agreement over a silly or politically incorrect comment that the speaker agrees with” (UD). Stinson uses this phrase to an exaggerated extent. He uses this phrase in the same way, but adds it to a ridiculous story that no one will believe. This phrase does not have a Croatian equivalent, but it can be translated as *živa istina*. It was made up by the show's creators and was popularized by the social media and the Internet.

“Pojeo sam šest Big Mac-ova za ručak jučer. Živa istina.”

#### 2. Lawyered

“Ah ha, so the oldest profession would be fishermen. Kaboom! You've been lawyered” (UD)!

A phrase used by the character “Marshall Eriksen”. Eriksen finished law school and is a lawyer. The phrase is used to win an argument and prove someone wrong by following the law. When Eriksen outsmarts someone in an argument, he yells: “Lawyered!” to indicate that someone is beaten in a verbal discourse. This phrase does not have an equivalent in the Croatian language as it is an original PU from the TV series. There is no Croatian equivalent but its meaning could be explained by a paraphrase *dokazati nešto na temelju pravne struke*. However, the phraseological unit's translation could be *Bum! Pravnik pobjeđuje. / Pobjeda za pravnika./ Ipak sam ja pravnik! / Pravnik zna bolje!*

### 3. Suit up

“Are we going to that party?” “Of course, we are Ted, so suit up” (UD)!

A PU used by the character “Barney Stinson” meaning it is time “to get changed from one's present attire into a suit” (UD). He uses it to tell his friends when it is the proper time to wear a suit; usually before trying to seduce a woman into a one-night stand. As most of the original PU in HIMYM this PU also does not have a Croatian equivalent. This would simply be translated as *obući odijelo*.

“Idemo li na taj tulum?” “Naravno da idemo, Ted, zato obuci odijelo!”

### 4. Eating a sandwich

“So, there we were, eating a sandwich. The biggest sandwich we had ever eaten” (UD).

A PU used by the character “Ted Mosby”. The premise of the show is Mosby telling his children the story of how he met their mother. In the scene that he is describing, he and his friend are smoking marijuana and therefore does not want to paint that picture to his children. He uses a euphemism “to eat a sandwich” in place of “to smoke a joint.” This phrase does not have an equivalent in the Croatian language as it is also an original phrase from the show and was popularized by the Internet. Croatian translation would be *jesti sendvič*, but one must be aware that its meaning is not literal.

“I, bili smo tamo, “jeli smo sendvič”. Najveći sendvič koji smo ikada jeli.”

### 5. Challenge accepted

“This cannot be done the night before. Student: Challenge Accepted” (UD).

“A saying that shall be used in a situation where someone or something says a definite statement you disagree with” (UD). Another PU made popular by “Barney Stinson”. Whenever a member of their group says that something cannot be done, Stinson exclaims “Challenge accepted” and tries to accomplish the impossible task. This PU was made popular by Stinson and became an Internet meme for years. It denotes a challenge which is difficult or impossible to complete but it somehow completed. It would be translated as *izazov prihvaćen*, and is fully equivalent with the English version.

“Ovo ne može biti napravljeno dan prije. Student: Izazov prihvaćen.”

## 6. To be uptight

“Don't get uptight about the exam - just do your best” (CaOD).

“*Being uptight* means to be worried or nervous and not able to relax” (CaOD). It is used as an adjective and it is used in an informal situation. It is usually not used as one describing oneself, but one uses this adjective to describe the other person. The Croatian translation would be *biti ukočen* and it is completely equivalent to its English counterpart.

“Nemoj se ukočiti zbog ispita – samo daj sve od sebe.”

## 7. Check out

“You have to check out the nursing home before putting your mother in it” (CaOD).

*Check out* is PU with a lot of different meanings. According to the Cambridge dictionary the meaning of this phrase is “to examine something or get more information about it in order to be certain that it is true, safe, or suitable.” It is used in informal situations and the Croatian equivalent would be *baciti oko na nešto* or *proučiti nešto*.

“Moraš proučiti dom prije nego što smjestiš svoju majku u njega.”

## 8. Back me up

“My family backed me up throughout the court case” (CaOD).

*To back someone up* means “to provide support for someone or something” (CaOD). It is usually used when one needs support and is unsure of himself or if one finds himself in a situation where he is outnumbered in a disagreement and needs someone to support and verify his opinion. There is no equivalent PU in the Croatian language, but the verb *podržati* would be used instead.

“Obitelj me podržavala tijekom cijelog sudskog postupka.”

## 9. To have an expiration date or to pass the expiration date

“There just came a day when I realized I had passed my expiry date, and that I could no longer perform my duties as the company required.” (FD).

Used in a metaphorical sense as it does not relate to a product that has an expiration date (e. g. drugs, food etc.), but to something that will end. It is “the last day on which a product or service can be used



“(CaOD) or in this case, it means that Robin’s relationship is definitely going to end. The Croatian translation would be *sve ima rok trajanja* or *isteći rok valjanosti*.

“Došao je dan kada sam shvatio da mi je istekao rok valjanosti i da više ne mogu obavljati svoje dužnosti kako to tvrtka zahtijeva.”

### **10. Bend over backwards**

“He bends over backwards to accommodate his customers” (CoOD).

“To exert a lot of effort towards some end. This phrase is often used to express frustration when one's efforts go unrecognized” (FD). This phraseological unit is used to emphasize one’s efforts to please someone else. Croatian translation would be *činiti sve što je u vašoj moći*.

“On čini sve što je u njegovoj moći da udovolji svojim kupcima.”

### **11. Don’t hold your breath**

“If know you hope Monica comes to the meeting, but don't hold your breath—she hasn't been to one all year” (FD).

“If you tell someone *to not hold their breath*, it means you are indicating to someone they should not expect something to happen. It is unlikely to happen soon or at all. “The idea being that one couldn't hold one's breath long enough for the unlikely thing to happen” (FD). The Croatian translation would be *nemoj se previše nadati*.

“Znam da se nadaš da će Monica doći na sastanak, ali nemoj se previše nadati – nije bila ni na jednom sastanku cijele godine.”

### **12. To be on the hook**

“He's still on the hook for the cost of the repairs” (MWD).

*To be on the hook* means “to be held responsible (for something); to be obliged or committed (to something)” (FD). Which means, if something goes bad, you will be *on the hook* for it. There is no possible fully equivalent Croatian translation for this PU, it can only be translated by particular verbs

for the particular situation. (E. g. We are on the hook for attempted kidnapping - *Okrivljeni smo za pokušaj otmice.*)

“Još uvijek je dužan za troškove popravka”.

### **13. Tag along**

“I don't know her, she just tagged along with us” (CaOD).

*To tag along* means “to go somewhere with a person or group, usually when they have not asked you to go with them” (CaOD). It is used when someone joins your company even if you do not want it. It is an informal PU. The Croatian translation would be simply *pridružiti se nekome* or more correctly *prikrpiti se nekome*.

“Ne znam ju, samo nam se prikrpala.”

### **14. Knock ‘em dead**

"Knock em dead boy, you'll do great" his mom yelled from the car (UD).

*Knock ‘em dead* is a PU “said to someone to increase their confidence before they appear or do something in public, especially something formal such as giving a speech in front of a crowd or performing a show” (CoOD). It is an informal way of boosting one's confidence and giving one support. There is no full Croatian equivalent, but a Croatian would use the phrase *obori ih s nogu* or *sruši ih s nogu* which does have a connection to the original PU with impressing someone so much you put them on the ground.

“Obori ih s nogu, bit ćeš super! njegova majka viknula je iz auta.”

### **15. Keep an eye on someone/something**

“Hey, thanks again for keeping an eye on her yesterday” (HIMYM, Season 4, episode11).

*Keeping an eye on someone* means “to watch someone or something or stay informed about the person’s behaviour, esp. to keep someone out of trouble” (CaOD). The Croatian equivalent would be *držati nekoga na oku* or *pripaziti na nekoga*.

“Hej, hvala ti što si pripazio na njega jučer.”

### **16. Handle (New York)**

“Look maybe I was wrong, she sounds like she handled Barney just fine, maybe she’ll be able to handle New York” (HIMYM, Season 4, episode 11).

One of the dichotomies of the show is the eternal fight about which country is better: Canada or the USA? That is why the PU *to handle* was used in the show in the phrase *to handle New York*, which means to deal with the constant bustling life of being a New Yorker. The complete PU does not have a Croatian translation while the original PU of *handle* would be translated as *nositi se s nečime*, *podnijeti nešto* or *uhvatiti se u koštac* (G).

“Gle, možda sam bio u krivu, zvuči kao da je podnijela Barneya dobro, možda bude uspjela podnijeti i New York.”

### **17. Turn over a new leaf**

“He realized he was in the wrong and promised to turn over a new leaf” (CoOD).

“*To turn over a new leaf* in your life means to start behaving in a better, positive way” (CaOD). It can also mean to start behaving in a completely different positive way. The PU became so popular in Croatian media that the translation is fully equivalent in the Croatian language - *okrenuti novi list*.

“On je shvatio da je bio u krivu i obećao je okrenuti novi list.”

### **18. Eat it up**

“I told them that I like this stupid school, and they totally ate it up—I guess I’m a pretty good actress (FD).

“*To eat it up* means “to believe unquestioningly that something is true” (FD). It is used in informal situations and PU like this would not be used in formal situations. This PU has a full Croatian equivalent. The translation would be *nasjesti na nešto*.

“Rekla sam im da mi se sviđa ova glupa škola, i nasjeli su – čini se da sam prilično dobra glumica.”

### **19. Spreads like wildfire**

“The news spread like wildfire (MWD)

“If something, especially new or rumor, *spreads like wildfire*, it spreads extremely quickly”. (CoOD). It is PU used widely in media, both in informal and formal situations. The Croatian language does not have an equivalent which would encompass all of its meanings. When relating to the part about rumours, *širiti glasine* would be the equivalent. Another possible translation would be *širi se brzinom svjetlosti*.

“Vijesti se šire brzinom svjetlosti.”

The second part of the analysis includes the 11 phraseological units from the TV series *Two and a Half Men*.

### **“Two and a Half Men”**

#### **20. Fix someone up**

“Jacques tried to fix me up with his older sister” (CaOD).

Phraseological unit fix someone up has more than one meaning, but in the series this idiom means “to find a romantic partner for someone” (CaOD) or “to arrange a date for two people” (FD). It is an informal expression. The Croatian translation would be *namjestiti nekoga* or *srediti nekoga nekome*.

“Jacques mi je pokušao srediti svoju sestru.”

### **21. Look at/on the bright side**

“Look on the bright side - no one was badly hurt” (CaOD).

*To look at the bright side* means “to find good things in a bad situation” (CaOD). This phraseological unit can be used ironically. The Croatian translation of full equivalence would be *pogledaj to s vedrije strane*.

“Pogledaj to s vedrije strane – nitko nije bio strašno ozlijeđen.”

### **22. Got it covered**

“Don't worry about a thing. We've got you covered” (MWD).

“Got it covered” means “to have done, gotten, or provided whatever is needed: take care of everything” (MWD). The Croatian translation is *sve je sređeno* or *riješeno*.

“Nemoj se brinuti ni o čemu. Mi ćemo sve riješiti.”

### **23. Watch your mouth**

“Watch your mouth! I don't care how you speak at home, that's not how we talk here” (FD).

If someone is being rude or is using vulgar language, *watch your mouth* would be used to warn them not to continue the way they are acting. The Croatian equivalent would be *pazi što pričaš, pripazi na jezičinu* with the second one being a stronger version of it. This translation has full equivalence with the English one.

“Pazi što pričaš! Ne zanima me kako razgovaraš kod kuće, ovdje se ne izražavamo tako.”

### **24. Look after somebody**

“He looks after his son during the day” (CaOD).

To look after somebody means “to take care of or be in charge of someone or something” (CaOD). It is a casual PU used in everyday life, but it is not informal. The Croatian equivalent is *brinuti se o nekome*.

“On brine o svome sinu tijekom dana.”

### **25. Walk it off**

“She twisted her ankle and tried to walk it off, but it hurt too much” (CaOD).

*Walk it off* means “To attempt to alleviate an injury, typically a leg or foot injury, by walking until the pain dissipates. Typically used as an imperative, sometimes one intended to be humorous” (FD). It is an informal way of giving support to someone who has suffered an injury. The injury could be lighter or more difficult depending on the situation. A light injury can be just walked off, while a more difficult one could if the person is of strong physical constitution. If the injury is too difficult to be dealt with by just walking it off, the expression could just be used in a humorous way. The Croatian translation could be *prehodati ozljedu ili bolest*.

“Uganula je gležanj i pokušala je prehodati ozljedu, ali previše je boljelo.”

### **26. Oh, what the hell, (let’s do it)**

“I was supposed to be working this evening but what the hell - I’ll see you at the bar in half an hour” (CaOD).

A PU “used as an exclamation used to emphasize surprise, shock, anger, disgust, etc.; or why not; one might as well; it makes no difference anyway” (FD). It is an informal expression and not a courteous one, while some people would also find it vulgar that is why one should be careful when to use it. The Croatian translation would be *koga briga* or *neka bude što bude*.

“Trebao sam raditi večeras, ali neka bude što bude - vidimo se u baru za pola sata.”

### **27. What a drag / a drag**

“I don't know who invited this guy to the party. He is a such a drag (FD)!”

“Phrase used for showing distaste for a situation. Mostly used for something that disrupts pleasurable (often illegal) activities, or requires too much work” (UD). What a drag can be used after any major request, or statement in order to show annoyance. The Croatian equivalent would be *koja gnjavaža!* Or of a person *gnjavator/davež*.

“Ne znam tko je pozvao ovog tipa na tulum. On je baš gnjavator.”

### **28. Right off the bat**

“He learned right off the bat that you can't count on anything in this business” (CoOD).

This phraseological unit means “immediately” or “at the very beginning of a process or event” (CaOD). The Croatian translation of this phraseological unit from Hrvatsko-engleski frazeološki rječnik is *ne časeći časa, ne gubeći vrijeme, što je moguće brže, bez oklijevanja*. Croatian paraphrase could simply be *odmah* or *smjesta*.

“Odmah je naučio da ne možeš računati ni na što u ovom poslu.”

### **29. In the way**

“It's a small street, and he parked right in the way” (CaOD).

This phraseological unit means “in a position that prevents something from happening or someone from moving” (CaOD). This phraseological unit expresses annoyance because one's action or presence interferes with your plans or actions.

Croatian translation would be “nešto na putu” or simply “prepreka”.

“To je mala ulica i on je parkirao baš na mom putu.”

### **30. Work out**

“Let's hope this new job works out well for him” (CaOD).

The phraseological unit work out has various meanings. In the series, if something works out it means that it functions. The Cambridge Dictionary defines this phraseological unit as “(of a situation) to happen or develop in a particular, esp. a satisfactory, way, or (of a person) to be suitable for a particular situation.” The Croatian equivalent would be *funkcionirati* or *štimati*.

“Nadajmo se da će mu novi posao štimati.”

## 5 Conclusion

This research is based on 30 phraseological units from the popular TV series *How I Met Your Mother* and *Two and a Half Men*. These two series were chosen because they are a great representation of how phraseological units are used in everyday life. Taking that into consideration, one of the aims of this research is to show how important phraseology and phraseological units are in both languages. Both analyzed series use everyday language and both employ many phraseological units.

The TV series *How I Met Your Mother* is a great source of phraseological units since the series itself coined some new phraseological units (the first five analyzed phraseological units) that gained popularity and took root in the language.

Another aim of this research is to show how problematic the translation of phraseological units can be. Very rarely a complete equivalent of a phraseological unit could be found, and very often it could only be translated with a paraphrase.

To conclude, the meaning of idiomatic expressions is rarely clear and obvious. This is why they make an interesting research topic. Also, idiomatic expressions make languages more colorful and more expressive, and are therefore an indispensable part of any language.



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