

# Idioms of Fashion and Clothing in English and Croatian

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Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

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Preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i mađarskog jezika i književnosti

Josipa Jambrešić

**Idiomi semantičkog polja mode i odijevanja u engleskom i hrvatskom  
jeziku**

Završni rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Goran Schmidt

Osijek, 2021.

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## **Abstract**

An idiom is “a group of words in a fixed order that have a particular meaning that is different from the meanings of each word on its own” (Cambridge Dictionary). As such, idioms are crucial parts of any language as they enrich the vocabulary and increase the expressive possibilities. Since phraseology is an important part of any language, this research is based on the analysis of idioms of fashion and clothing in English and Croatian; English as the source language and Croatian as the target language.

The research is divided in three major parts. The first part of the research consists of a brief theoretical overview of the basic phraseological terms which need to be explained in order to understand the aim of this research and its significance. The second part of the research consists of idioms of fashion and clothing. In this part their meaning and translation into Croatian are defined, explained, and exemplified. The list of idioms was compiled from various dictionaries of idioms which serves as a corpus. Another important aspect of this research is that it deals with the translation of phrases and the common problems that occur within the translation. The research shows how some idioms have their equivalent in Croatian, while some are translated and explained with a paraphrase. The last part of the research is a brief conclusion of the topic which highlights the importance of phraseological units since their usage enriches the vocabulary of any language.

Keywords: phraseology, idiom, English, Croatian, language, translation

Abbreviations used:

CD - Cambridge Dictionary

FD - The Free Dictionary by Farlex

OD - Oxford Dictionaries



## Contents

<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Theoretical Background</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2.1 Phraseology and phraseological unit (PU)</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2.2 Characteristics of PU</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>2.2.1 Polylexemic structure</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>2.2.2 Stability</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>2.2.3 Lexicalization</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2.2.4 Idiomaticity</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>3 Research Design</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>3.1 The aim</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>3.2 Analysis pattern</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>4 Analysis</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>5 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>16</b>

# 1 Introduction

Idioms make a very important and big part of any language. The English language is rich in idioms and it is impossible to imagine it any other way. In the preface of her book *English Phraseology Coursebook*, Sabine Fiedler defines phraseology as “one of the most fascinating and at the same time most difficult aspect of language” (Fiedler, 2007:7) due to phraseological units’ “unpredictable meanings and their connotations” (ibid.). Considering the fact that non-native speakers of a language frequently have difficulties with understanding the meaning of an idiom, this research deals with analysis of idioms of fashion and clothing in English and their equivalents and translation in Croatian.

The research includes the analysis of idioms of fashion and clothing in English and its translation in the target language, Croatian. It consists of 30 randomly selected idioms of fashion and clothing, their meaning and usage in English, as well as their equivalents and translation in Croatian.

The research is divided in three major parts. The first part deals with theoretical background that explains the basic and the most common terms in phraseology. In the second part the corpus is described; the list consists of randomly chosen idioms found in the various dictionaries. The second part also deals with the analysis of idioms, their meaning, usage, and translation into Croatian. The final part is the conclusion that briefly explains the importance of idioms in any language.

## 2 Theoretical Background

As phraseological units are a big part of both English and Croatian language, in this part of the research, their theoretical background is briefly explained. It is necessary to understand what phraseology and phraseological units are in order to understand the aim of this research.

### 2.1 Phraseology and phraseological unit (PU)

First of all, in order to understand the importance of idioms in any language we have to define some basic terms. The term phraseology can be used to define both the field of study (phraseology research) and also the set of linguistic units - phraseological units. “The phraseological unit (PU) is the subject of phraseology and this research as well” (Fiedler, 2007: 15). The term phraseological unit has been widely used and is of such significance to a language that it has equivalents in many languages like *unite phraséologique* in French, *phraseologische Einheit* in German, *frazološka jedinica* in Croatian

(ibid.). The term idiom is the traditional term but is also frequently used “as a hypernym to cover many kinds of conventional multi-word units” (ibid.). Fiedler also lists some frequent usages of the word “idiom” when it does not mean the same as “phraseological unit”. Some of those are: “the form of speech peculiar or proper to a people or country; own language or tongue” (ibid.), “a characteristic mode of expression in music, art or writing; an instance of this (ibid.), or “the specific character, property or genius of any language; the manner of expression which is neutral or peculiar to it” (ibid.).

## 2.2 Characteristics of PU

In order to understand what the phraseological unit is, it is crucial to understand its prominent characteristics. As such, polylexemic structure, stability, lexicalization, and idiomaticity will be briefly discussed.

### 2.2.1 Polylexemic structure

Phraseological units have a polylexemic structure – they consist of at least two independent words. For example, “an old flame” or “a sticky end.” However, Fiedler questions whether it is correct to choose size, i.e. the orthographic structure, as a basis for separating PUs from non-phraseological items” (Fiedler 2007: 18). By simply changing the structure of a phraseological unit into a compound, we disobey this rule. An example for this is the PU “to pull the wires” which can easily be put as “wire-puller” without losing the idiomatic meaning.

Nevertheless, Fiedler emphasizes the importance of differentiation between PUs and compounds: “Expressions such as *egghead* or *birdbrain* share the features of idiomaticity and connotative content with PUs, but they are not accepted as part of the phrasicon. As compounds, they are the subject of word-formation.” (ibid.).

Another problem occurs when it comes to the upper limit of the PUs as sometimes PUs can take on the form of sentences. For example, *A friend in need is a friend indeed.*

### 2.2.2 Stability

Relative stability can be considered the most important characteristic of PUs since that is what makes them distinctive from other random combinations of words. Substitution tests are used to prove this

characteristic as Fiedler suggests: *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush* is the only possible word order for that PU since *\*A bird in the hand is worth three in the bush* or *\*A bird in cage is worth two in the bush* do not share meaning with the original PU.

However, there are some possible variations. Fiedler (2007: 20) lists three types:

a. Structural variants – the use of function word or the spelling may vary

e.g. *by/in leaps and bounds; (as) dry as a bone*

b. Variation of lexical constituents

e.g. *to throw/cast pearls before swine; a bad/rotten apple*

c. Variation of both grammatical and lexical elements

e.g. *to put/have/lay a/one's finger to/on one's lips*

### 2.2.3 Lexicalization

Lexicalization is a term used to describe the fact that a PU is retained in the collective memory of a language community (Fiedler 2007: 21). This means that PUs are fixed and ready-made units as they are recognized and accepted in language. The proof of this characteristic is that it is often sufficient to mention only a part of the PU and the language speaker understand it.

The process of lexicalization is simple. The process of lexicalization of a PU is similar to that of the simple word lexeme. Same as new word, new PUs are finding their way into the language and can originate in all fields of social life” (ibid.).

### 2.2.4 Idiomaticity

As already mentioned, an idiom is “a group of words in a fixed order that have a particular meaning that is different from the meanings of each word on its own” (CD). This is called idiomaticity as it “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. This phenomenon

causes many problems for language learners, who usually know the meanings of all the words in a phrase (e.g. pull and leg) but are unable to deduce the meaning “to tease sb.” of the expression to pull sb.’s leg” (Fiedler 2007 :22).

Some idioms’ meanings are more transparent than the others. This is why idiomaticity is graded. Therefore, they are real idioms whose meaning is hard to decipher and those whose meaning is transparent and obvious.

### 3 Research Design

This research consists of 30 randomly chosen idioms of fashion and clothing in their source language English and their translation into the target language Croatian. The research includes an idiom and an example sentence in English, as well as the translation of the idiom and the sentence into Croatian. The translation was found on web sites *Kolokacijska baza hrvatskoga jezika* and *Baza frazema hrvatskoga jezika* which contain the majority of Croatian phraseological units.

#### 3.1 The aim

The aim of this research is to analyze 30 randomly selected English idioms of fashion and clothing by explaining their meaning and finding their equivalents or possible translation into Croatian. Another important aim of the research is to show how crucial idioms are in the structure of any language as they open many possibilities to express our thoughts, ideas, and emotions. As such, idioms are often found in everyday life, but also in poetry, literature, and other forms of art.

#### 3.2 Analysis pattern

The analysis of an idiom includes: an idiom, example sentence, translation into Croatian, and the translated sentence. Sometimes, there is no Croatian equivalent so only its literal translation or paraphrase is given.

### 4 Analysis

#### (1) A wolf in sheep’s clothing

“My grandfather was a wolf in sheep’s clothing – he looked like a sweet old man, but he was really mean.”

The meaning of this PU: “a person with a pleasant and friendly appearance that hides the fact that they are evil” (CD). In other words, this phrase is used when someone or something seems to be good when in fact they are not or it is not. There is a Croatian equivalent “vuk u ovčjoj koži” or “vuk u janjećoj koži.” The Croatian expression shares the meaning with the English one, although this is not always the case when it comes to translating phraseological units.

“Moj djed je bio vuk u ovčjoj koži – izgledao je kao drag stariji čovjek, ali zapravo je bio bezobrazan.”

## (2) At the drop of a hat

“They were always ready to help. Just say the word and they'd be there at the drop of a hat.”

“If you do something at the drop of a hat, you do it immediately without stopping to think about it” (CD). “At the drop of a hat” means with no delay. Its usage is informal and it can also mean without hesitation or good reason. This can be translated into Croatian as “dok si rekao keks”, “odgovoriti kao iz puške”, or “u tren oka.” These translations work, but none of them is an exact equivalent, as the English idiom contains the word “hat.”

“Oni su uvijek bili spremni pomoći. Samo trebaš reći riječ i oni bi došli u tren oka.”

## (3) “wear your heart on your sleeve”

“But I can tell you're not the type to wear your heart on your sleeve.”

This means “to make your feelings and emotions obvious rather than hiding them” (CD). The meaning of this idiom is transparent since it includes the word heart. The Croatian translation would be “nositi srce na dlanu.” It partially matches the English idiom since the English idiom includes the word “sleeve”, while the Croatian one uses “palm”.

“Ali mogu reći da ti nisi osoba koja nosi svoje srce na dlanu.”

## (4) “wear the trousers”

“An old English folk tale has it that parsley grows best in a household where the wife wears the trousers.”

The idiom “wear the trousers” means “(especially of a woman) to be the person in a relationship who is in control and who makes decisions for both people” (CD). It refers to the person who is in charge and it usually refers to the dominant member of a household. In Croatian, there is an equivalent “nositi hlače.”

“Jedna stara engleska narodna priča kaže da peršin najbolje uspijeva u domaćinstvu u kojem supruga nosi hlače.”

(5) “put a sock in it!”

“Hey, put a sock in it, will you? I'm trying to work here.”

This idiom is “used to tell someone to be quiet or stop making so much noise” (CD). This is used as a request for silence. Its usage is informal and it originated in Britain. It is used when someone is being noisy, talkative, and annoying. The Croatian translation of this idiom is “začepiti gubicu” or “zavezati usta”.

“Hej, zaveži usta, hoćeš li? Pokušavam raditi ovdje.”

(6) “keep it under your hat”

“I'll tell you what happened, but you have to keep it under your hat.”

Keep it under your hat means to keep something a secret or “To not reveal or discuss something publicly” (FD). Since under people’s hats are their heads, this is where the secret is to be held. In Croatian it would be paraphrased as “nikome ni riječ” or “zadrži to za sebe.”

“Reći ću ti što se dogodilo, ali moraš to zadržati za sebe.”

(7) “all mouth and no trousers”

“He says he's going to complain to the manager, but he's all mouth and no trousers.”

This means “to talk a lot about doing something but never do it” (CD). This is used to talk about someone who tends to talk boastfully without any intention of acting on his words. There is no equivalent in Croatian but it could be translated as “laje, ali ne grize” or in some contexts - “pričati bajke.”

“Kaže kako će se žaliti šefu, ali priča bajke.”

(8) “a bee in your bonnet”

“Mum's got such a bee in her bonnet about the wedding”.

This idiom is used when someone is preoccupied or obsessed with an idea. Oxford Dictionary defines it as “to think or talk about something all the time and to think that it is very important.” This PU is used informally. There is an equivalent in Croatian “imati bubu u glavi”, as well as “motati se po glavi.”

“Mama ima bubu u glavi u vezi vjenčanja.”

(9) “the cat's pajamas”

“Tom's new car is really the cat's pajamas!”

This is an idiom meaning “to be better than everyone else” (CD) or “to be the best thing, person, idea” (OD). This idiom is used informally. There is no Croatian equivalent, but it could be translated as “prva liga.”

“Tomov novi auto je baš prva liga!”

(10) “handle with kid gloves”

“He has become so sensitive after his divorce. You need to handle him with kid gloves.”



This idiom is used when we treat somebody very carefully and gently because we don't want them to become angry or upset. Croatian version is "reći /komu što/ u rukavicama" or it would be translated with a paraphrase "tretirati s oprezom" or "paziti što govorimo."

"Osjetljiv je nakon razvoda. Trebaš paziti što mu govoriš."

(11) "put on the wooden overcoat"

"He wanted to spend his time and money traveling the world before he put on the wooden overcoat."

"Put on the wooden overcoat" is a slang that means to die as the wooden overcoat refers to a coffin. In Croatian there is an idiom "otegnuti papke" which is not an equivalent but it also means to die. Otherwise, it could simply be translated as "umrijeti".

Htio je iskoristiti svoje vrijeme i novac putujući svijetom prije nego što otegne papke/ umre.

(12) "A feather in one's cap"

"Getting nominated for an Oscar is the biggest feather in a film actor's cap."

This phrase's meaning is "an action that you can be proud of" (CD). The meaning of the phrase is easily understood since the placing of a feather in a hat has been a worldwide symbol of achievement. Adding a feather in one's cap is an important Native-American tradition as the feather was added in a cap of a warrior who made a brave deed. The equivalent in Croatian would be "pero na glavi" or "kititi se perjem." In Croatian, there is a similar, more frequently used phrase "kititi se tuđim perjem" that means to attribute other people's success to yourself.

"Biti nominiran za Oskara je najveće pero na glavi filmskog glumca."

(13) "below the belt"

"That was distinctly below the belt!"

If a remark is below the belt, it is very insulting and unfair (CD). Croatian version is “udarac ispod pojasa” but it can also be translated as a paraphrase “nisko” or “niski udarac”.

“To je bilo izrazito ispod pojasa!”

(14) “tighten your belt”

“I’ve had to tighten my belt since I stopped working full-time.”

An idiom “tighten your belt” means “to spend less money than you did before because you have less money” (CD). In Croatian there is an equivalent “stegnuti remen” or “stegnuti kaiš”.

“Morao sam stegnuti remen otkad sam prestao raditi na puno radno vrijeme.”

(15) “put on your thinking cap”

“If we all put on our thinking caps, I’m sure we can come up with a way to earn enough money to go to the baseball game this weekend.”

This PU means “To begin thinking or considering very carefully and seriously (about something) (FD). Also, CD’s definition is “to try to solve a problem by thinking about it”. Croatian equivalent does not mention “cap” but “head” – “mućnuti glavom”.

“Ako svi mućnemo glavom, siguran sam da možemo smisliti način da zaradimo dovoljno novca da odemo na utakmicu bejzbola ovaj vikend.”

(16) “too big for one's boots”

“He’s gotten too big for his boots ever since he got that promotion.”

“Overconfident in one's importance, skill, or authority” or “behaving as if one is more important or influential than one actually is” (FD). In Croatian, it would be translated as “pun sebe” or simply “postati arogantan”.

“Postao je baš pun sebe otkad je dobio promaknuće.”

(17) “on the button”

“True to his word, the detective arrived at 1:38 PM on the button. “

“On the button” means “precisely accurate or exactly right.” (FD) it is most frequently used for time, but it can be used for locations as well. The most common translation in Croatian would be “točan kao švicarski sat”. “Precizno” or “točno” are also valid translations.

“Vjoran svojoj riječi, detektiv je stigao točno u 1:38.”

(18) “if the shoe fits, wear it”

“I know you don't like being called unreliable, but if the shoes fits, wear it.”

“If something (typically negative) applies to one, one should acknowledge it or accept responsibility or blame for it” (FD). The PU “if the shoe fits, wear it” is derogatory and negative as it is used when one must accept the consequences of his actions. In Croatian it would be translated as “tako je kako je”, “pogledati istini u oči”, or simply “prihvatiti istinu”.

“Znam da ne voliš da te zovu nepouzdanim, ali tako je kako je.”

(19) “fashion victim”

It's one thing to have good taste in clothing, but it's another to be a fashion victim who always needs to be seen wearing popular brand names.

A fashion victim is “a person who places too much value on popular trends and styles.” (FD) There is an equivalent in Croatian – “žrtva mode”.

“Jedno je imati dobar modni ukus, a drugo biti žrtva mode koja mora uvijek biti viđena kako nosi poznate brendove.”

(20) “tit for tat”

“She's mad at me, so she refuses to help me plan this event—typical tit for tat.”

“Tit for tat” or “A situation in which you do something bad to somebody because they have done the same to you” (OD). There is a similar PU in English: “eye for an eye”, and in Croatian: “oko za oko, zub za zub”.

“Ljuta je na mene i odbija mi pomoći isplanirati ovaj događaj – tipično oko za oko, zub za zub.”

(21) “fancy pants”

“We don't need a fancy-pants vacuum, we just need one that can suck up dirt.”

“Fancy pants” is used to describe someone who is superior or high-class but in a pretentious way. It can also be an expression to describe someone who is over-dressed as this PU is derogatory. It can be translated as “fensi-šmensi” but there is no expression that includes “pants”.

“Ne trebamo neki fensi-šmensi usisavač, već samo neki koji usisava prljavštinu.”

(22) “men in suits”

“We're lucky if we get a few hundred dollars at the end of the year as a bonus, while the men in suits walk away with enough to buy a new house.”

This PU's meaning is pretty obvious. The Free Dictionary defines it as: “People, especially men, who have a lot of influence, authority, and money, especially those in the top positions in a business or other organization.” This can also be used for people who are in control of an organization or company. There is no such idiom in Croatian so the translation is simply “ljudi u odijelima” or “biznismeni”.

“Bit ćemo sretni ako na kraju godine kao bonus dobijemo 100 dolara dok ljudi u odijelima dobiju dovoljno da kupe novu kuću.”

(23) “old hat”

“Today's hits rapidly become old hat.”

As the idiom suggests, an “old hat” is someone or something that is old-fashioned and no longer interesting. Croatian translation is “stara stvar”, “stara pjesma”, or “stara priča”.

“Današnji hitovi rapidno postaju stare pjesme.”

(24) “knock somebody/something into a cocked hat”

“This new software is going to knock everything else on the market into a cocked hat.”

This idiom means “to be very much better than somebody/something” (FD). In Croatian there is an expression: “prešišati nekoga” or “pomesti konkurenciju”.

“Ovaj novi softver će prešišati sve ostale na tržištu.”

(25) “roll up your sleeves”

“We've planned everything – now it's time to roll up our sleeves and get started.”

As the idioms suggests, this means “to prepare for hard work” (CD). There is an equivalent in Croatian “zasukati rukave”.

“Sve smo isplanirali – sada je vrijeme da zasučemo rukave i započnemo.”

(26) “fit like a glove”

“I love these pants because they fit like a glove and they're so comfortable.”

This idiom means “to be the perfect size and shape for someone” (CD). In Croatian there is an interesting phrase “pristaje /komu što/ kao saliveno”. These two idioms share meaning although the translation is not literal.

“Volim ove hlače jer pristaju kao salivene i tako su udobne.”

(27) “put oneself in someone else's shoes/situation”

“Put yourself in my place – I was scared, and I had nobody to talk to.”

“Put oneself in someone else’s shoes” or “to imagine that you are someone in a difficult situation, and imagine how that person feels (CD). In Croatian this would be translated as “biti u /čijoj/ koži”, “u tuđim cipelema”, or “staviti se u nečiju poziciju.”

“Postavi se u moju poziciju – bila sam uplašena i nisam imala s kim razgovarati.”

(28) “dirty laundry”

“I don't want to hear about her dirty laundry. Why do you feel it necessary to gossip about things like this?”

“Dirty laundry” is “one's very private, personal matters, especially that which may be embarrassing” (FD). Croatian’s version is “prljavo rublje” and it shares the exact same meaning as the English idiom.

“Ne želim slušati o njezinom prljavom rublju. Zašto smatraš neophodnim tračati o takvim stvarima?”

(29) “Goody two-shoes” or “goody-goody”

“She’s a real goody-goody – I hate her!”

“A person who always behaves well, and perhaps has a disapproving attitude to people who do not” (OD) or “someone who behaves in a way intended to please people in authority” (CD). Both definitions describe a person who always obeys the rules and behaves properly. It is usually used as an informal disapproving of someone who fits the definition. There is no equivalent in Croatian but it can be translated as “dobrica”. In Croatian, it is not necessary disapproving but it can have negative connotations.

“Ona je baš dobrica – mrzim ju!”

(30) “burn a hole in one's pocket”

“Don't let that bonus burn a hole in your pocket—save it up for something you really want.”

This PU is used when somebody is very eager to spend his money. This usually refers to someone's money but it can refer to one's belongings or possessions as well. Croatian idioms “isprazniti džepove” or “potrošiti do posljednje lipa” are both acceptable translations for this idiom, however it depends on the context since none of them are equivalent to the English idiom.

“Nedaj da ti taj bonus isprazni džepove – sačuvaj ga za nešto što stvarno želiš.”

## 5 Conclusion

This research is based on 30 idioms of fashion and clothing in English and their translation into Croatian. One of the aims of this research was to show how phraseological units are important part of any language since they enhance and enrich the language and its possibilities. Phraseological units are often funny and creative in their expressiveness. As such, many of them are understood even before we are given their definition and meaning.

Another aim was to show how both English and Croatian are rich in idioms. These 30 analyzed idioms were chosen randomly from various dictionaries which offer countless number of phraseological units.

This research shows that a lot of English idioms have their equivalent in Croatian. However, it was also shown that languages are unique and their phraseological units are not always identical as some can be replaced with a different PU of the same meaning or with a paraphrase. In addition, some phraseological units can be translated literally since their meaning is transparent and recognizable.

To conclude, both English and Croatian have an abundant vocabulary which sometimes overlaps, but it can also differentiate in expression and style.



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