

BOOK REVIEW

GERDI. The Great English-Romanian Dictionary of Idioms. București: Editura Coresi 2007
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The work under review is co-authored by Vasile Poenaru, writer, translator and lexicographer and Cristian Săileanu, a writer and teacher of English in the United States. In their *Foreword*, Poenaru tells the reader how the dictionary was born, how his friend living in California, Săileanu, has, for two decades, worked on a kind of 'survival kit', an enormous collection of English idiomatic expressions, collocations, phrasal verbs, verbal clichés, dicta, famous quotations, proverbs and sayings. That was "everything he needed in order to integrate himself seamlessly in the American culture and be able to teach English to the native speakers of the language in their own country." Compiling the dictionary proper took the two authors "another seven years of extremely strenuous and dedicated efforts" (p. 8). We can only think of the hard work of separating idioms from other multiword lexical units to make an idea of a part of the whole undertaking.

Idioms, from their definition to their arbitrary/motivated nature, have long been a hotly-debated issue among theoretical linguists and lexicographers. They have lately have been defined as a special type of *phrasemes*, i.e. multiword units of the lexicon that are relatively stable in form and meaning. Idioms are "phrasemes with a high degree of idiomaticity (i.e. semantic reinterpretation and/or opacity) and stability (i.e. frozenness or lack of combinatorial freedom)" (Dobrovol'skiy 2006: 514). They are arbitrary only from the point of view of their production, but not from the perspective of their understanding, because most of them are clearly motivated by underlying structures of knowledge. These structures are often based on metaphor or on meanings related to local events, habits, traditions, myths or legends.

As the title suggests, *GERDI. The Great English-Romanian Dictionary of Idioms*. is indeed great: it is as useful to learners and teachers of English, to linguists, lexicographers and translators as it is big since it contains 18,000 English idioms.

The dictionary consists of three sections: (1) English idioms in alphabetical order (2) index of English expressions and (3) index of Romanian expressions.

The first part, i.e. English Idioms in Alphabetical Order covers 530 pages (pp. 17-546) and contains idioms used by English speakers in everyday situations; lots of them are very recent idioms, being for the first time entered into a dictionary. As in any bilingual dictionary, the means of explaining the meaning is not primarily the semantic definition, but a set of **target language equivalents**.

Thus, most of the English idioms are given more Romanian equivalents separated by a semicolon: e.g. *hit the deck* 1. *a se apuca de lucru*; 2. *a se da jos din pat*; *a face ochi*; 3. *a se trânti la pământ*; *a se arunca pe burtă*; *a face salt înainte*. Moreover, there are lots of synonymous expressions in which the noun is variable: e.g. *hit the deck/dirt*, *big cheese/fish/gun*, etc. Besides, mentions about the grammatical status such as (+Genitiv/+Dativ) are very important because they mark differences between English and Romanian: e.g. *be ablaze with a fi plin de stălucire și culoare grație* (+Dativ); *here's to în cinstea/sănătatea lui* (+Genitiv); *black eye to palmă la adresa* (+Genitiv); *atac la prestigiul* (+Genitiv); *pată pe reputația* (+Genitiv). There are also indications about the use of tenses which are not common in dictionaries: e.g. *be*

around the block (used in the Preset Perfect) *a avea ceva experiență în ale dragostei*. The same holds valid with remarks about the grammatical incorrectness of some phrases: e.g. *be ate up with sth* (slang, grammatically incorrect) *a fi ros de ceva* (figurat); *a-l măcina ceva* (figurat).

Furthermore, the indication (aproximativ) in the second column, after more Romanian equivalents of an English idiom is very important. For example, *have no business doing sth* 2. *a-i veni greu să înțeleagă cum de s-a putut întâmpla ceva*; *a nu înțelege cum de a fost posibil să se întâmple ceva*; *ceva ce e de neînțeles* (aproximativ); *cum se poate așa ceva?* (aproximativ); *have one's ass in a sling* (vulgar) *a fi în budă* (colocvial); *a fi la ananghie*; *a o mierli/sfecli* (figurat); *unde-ți stau picioarele, acolo-ți va sta și capul* (aproximativ); *hem and haw* *a da din colț în colț*; *a ezita*; *că sucită, că învârtită* (aproximativ); *hindsight is always 20/20* după război mulți viteji se arată (aproximativ). It is obvious that all of them are situations of non-equivalence.

The notes (zicătoare, proverb) are written for quite a number of idiomatic expressions: e.g. *be a close call/shave* *a scăpa ca prin urechile acului*; *be caught in a cleft/stick* *a fi în mare bucluc/dilemă*; *a fi prins între ciocan și nicovală* (zicătoare); *be caught in a double bind* *a fi prins într-un cerc vicios*; *a fi prins între ciocan și nicovală* (zicătoare); *be caught in the act* *a fi prins în flagrant delict*; *a fi prins cu mâta în sac* (zicătoare) *a fi prins asupra faptului*; *better safe than sorry* *paza bună trece primejdia rea* (proverb); *between a rock and a hard place* *între ciocan și nicovală* (zicătoare); *la răscruce* (figurat); *între Scylla și Caribda*; *prins la mijloc*; *bite off more than one can chew* *a se întinde mai mult decât îi este plapuma*; *a se înhăma la mai mult decât poate duce*; *a se angaja în ceva care-l depășește*; *go down the plughole/tube* (slang) *a se duce pe apa sâmbetei*; *have a narrow escape/squeak* *a scăpa ca prin urechile acului* (zicătoare); *have been to the school of hard knocks* *a avea școala vieții*; *a fi trecut prin ciur și prin dârmon* (zicătoare); *big oaks from little acorns grow* *stejarul cel falnic din ghinda mică crește* (proverb); *brevity is the soul of wit* *vorba multă, sărăcia omului*; *fii scurt și la obiect ca să te arăți isteț* (proverb), a.s.o.

Nevertheless, such a mention is not given for others which do occur as sayings: *be cruising for a bruising* (slang) *a o căuta cu lumânarea*; *a căuta scandal*; *be cooking with gas* (slang) *a mai veni de-acasă* (figurat); *a drowning man clutches at a straw* *se agață ca înecatul de pai/cândură*; *bite the hand that feeds one* *a mușca mâna care te hrănește*; *a fi nerecunoscător*; *pe cine nu lași să moară nu te lasă să trăiești*, etc.

Collocations are mostly represented by partitives which are not troublesome combinations. However, special attention is paid to idiomatic collocations such as *bean time* (slang, humorous) *ora de masă*; *ora de haleală*; *Bronx cheer* *huiduia*; *Buddha head* *chinezoii*; *budget squeeze* *criză financiară*, *dirt cheap* *de pomană*; *chilipir*; *la preț de nimic* (I bought this house dirt cheap); *big cheese/fish/gun* *barosan*; *mare ștab*; *grangur* (slang); *black Maria* (slang, old) *duba poliției/pușcării*, *big house* *închisoare*; *mititica*, *penitenciarul federal*. Many of them are obvious cases of non-equivalence: e.g. *breakfast of champions* (slang, humorous) *prima dușcă de băutură alcoolică băută pe burta goală dimineața*, etc. A large number of misleading collocations and expressions with a special structure are very difficult to translate: e.g. *da bomb* *cel mai cu moț*; *nemaipomenit*, *go gaga* *a da în mintea copiilor*; *a se scleroza*, *desk jockey* *hârțogar*; *scârța-scârța pe hârtie*, *dead men sticle goale*, *dead presidents* (slang) *dolari* (banknote), *dead on target* *sută la sută correct*, *la fix*, *credit hour* *oră de studiu universitar* (cursurile universitare sunt evaluate printr-un număr de credite...), *go into orbit* (slang) *a sări în sus până în tavan* (figurat); *a sări ca ars*; *a-i sări țandăra*, *a lua foc* (figurat), *go straight* *a duce o viață onestă* (în special după ce a comis ilegalități), *go south* *a se duce de râpă*; *a o lua în jos*; *a cădea* (despre piață, economie), *grandfather clause* *principiu de drept comun căruia i se aplică legea așa cum era ea formulată la momentul săvârșirii faptei*, *clauză ce ar face imposibilă retractarea*, *clauză asiguratorie*, *grease monkey* (humorous) *mechanic auto*, *hit the juice* (slang) *a se apuca de băutură*, etc.

Partially equivalent or symmetrical collocations also cause translation problems: e.g. *hired gun* asasin plătit, *hired hand* zilier, *hit the ceiling* a sări până în tavan (de furie) (figurat), etc.

However, perfectly equivalent or symmetrical collocations are included here, although this dictionary focuses on idiomatic patterns only. For example, such collocations and simple combinations as the following do not have an idiomatic meaning: *highway robbery* jaf la drumul mare (și figurat), *be pinned under* a fi prins sub, *be partial to/toward* a ține cu; a favoriza pe, *be serious about sb* a avea intenții serioase în privința cuiva, *be to blame* a fi de vină/responsabil de ceva, *be under stress* a fi stresat, *because of* din cauza, *coffee break* pauză de cafea, a.s.o.

The same holds valid with compounds. Many of them have an idiomatic meaning: e.g. *boob-tube* (slang, humorous) tembelizor (glumeț), *brown-nose* (slang) lingău; periuță (figurat); lingușitor, *burn-out* oboseală profundă provocată de prea multă muncă, *butt-ugly* (slang) urât ca moartea; nasol să-i pui perna pe față; urât de zici că-i moartea-n vacanță, *die-hard* încăpățânat; înrăit, *goody-goody* (informal, disapproving) persoană care face totul pentru a fi pe placul profesorilor/șefilor, etc; periuță (figurat).

Nevertheless, there are compounds without any idiomatic meaning: *hard-boiled* fiert tare (despre ouă), *baby-sitter* bonă, *safe-cracker* spărgător de seifuri, etc

The fact should be added that there are some lexicographical aspects which seem not to be in favour of the writing technique, the result being too much space taken up: 1. the repetition of the whole expression instead of writing the variable noun/verb/adjective after the slash; 2. the avoidance of abbreviations in bracketed indications referring to variety of English, register, modality, etc.; 3. the use of the semicolon with synonymous meanings; 4. the frequent use of the full forms of the Romanian pronouns (e.g. *a îl măcina ceva*, *a îi zâmbi cu toată fața*, *a îi da șpagă cuiva*, *a își da obștescul sfârșit*, *a își avea rădăcinile în*, etc.

Furthermore, since, in most cases, similar idioms in the source and target languages do not coincide in all their relevant features, additional means of semantic and pragmatic explanations are also provided. Here is an example, out of the many, in which both the source language idiom and the target language equivalent is accompanied by a note referring to usage: *mother's fair-haired boy* (ironic) = *baietelul mamei* (adesea ironic). Mentions such as (humorous, ironical, disapproving) are numerous: e.g. *canned speech* (disapproving) *discurs pregătit dinainte*; *carp about* (disapproving) *a se văita/plânge de*; *a face gălăgie/gură din cauza*; *castor-oil artist* (ironic, humorous) *doctor*; *chief cook and bottle washer* (humorous) *factotum*; *cel care le face pe toate*; *civil serpent* (humorous) *funcționar guvernamental* (humorous pun derived from 'civil servant', a.s.o.

Usage notes or labels are written before Romanian equivalents to indicate that the idiom is suitable only in certain situations. This is only natural because affect (the affective stance towards what is said) is a typical property of idioms, alongside with inflexibility (i.e. restricted syntax), figuration (i.e. figurative meaning), proverbiality (i.e. description of social activity compared to a concrete activity), informality (i.e. idioms are typically associated with informal speech styles or registers). Thus, besides the indication about the variety of English, there are indications about register: e.g. *be off beam* (British English, Australian English, informal) a fi incorect; a fi greșit, there are differences in meaning with the same expression depending on register: e.g. *be on the make* 1. a fi pus pe îmbogățire/parvenire; 2. (slang) a ieși la agățat (colocvial); *cook the books* (informal) a falsifica înscrisurile contabile pentru a înșela statul sau acționarii; a aplica cei șapte F ai contabilului comunist: fură frate fără frică formele fiind făcute; a falsifica conturile, etc.

As regards register, the authors of the dictionary warn their readers that GERDI also records idioms used in slang: "GERDI includes taboo words" (on the front cover).

Besides equivalents, usage notes or labels, the first section of GERDI includes **contexts** of usage which we believe is an indispensable part of any good dictionary.

Although the illustrative material is not based on literary citations but on the vivid language and on the author's experience with the spoken language in USA, the contextualizations are brief and clear: *My younger brother has always been mother's fair-haired boy. Nothing was too good for him.* They have greater impact upon the "end-users".

The second part, i.e. Index of English Expressions covers 319 pages (pp. 547- 866) and is of a great use in finding the idioms by means of the key word. For example, the idiom mentioned earlier, *mother's fair-haired boy*, is recorded under the dictionary entry 'boy'. The idea of combining alphabetical order of idioms with indices of the idioms' keywords is not only original, but also welcomed as it enables faster and easier access to the dictionary entries.

As far as the frequency of verbs and nouns in idioms is concerned, the largest number of idiomatic expressions are with the following verbs and nouns: *come, get, go, give, catch, break, bring, do, call, draw, fall, have, hold, keep, make, put, run, strike, take; eye, life, time, care, cash, business, cat, chance, day, ear, end, ground, hand, heart.*

The third part, i.e. Index of Romanian Expressions, covering 374 pages (pp. 867 – 1241) includes key words of the Romanian equivalents corresponding to the English idioms presented in part 1. The fact is worthwhile mentioning that that this part should not be regarded as a Romanian- English dictionary of idioms in a proper sense as the Romanian translations are not always idioms. With this brief remark we touch upon an important theoretical issue: the term 'idiom' in English may be understood as an umbrella term for all possible fixed expressions (e.g. idiom, phrasal verb, saying), whereas in Romanian it is used in a more restricted sense. This may explain why the authors' definition of the notion of 'idiom' is a very general one: "a group of words whose overall meaning is completely different from the sum of the meanings of each word taken separately (p. 8).

This section also helps us realize the frequency of idiomatic expressions with certain verbs and nouns: *ajunge, ajuta, arunca, avea, bate, băga, crede, da, face, gândi, întoarce, înțelege, lăsa, lua, merge, spune, ști, vorbi; cap, ban, loc, ochi, mână, minte, bătaie, atenție, apă, coadă, cuvânt, Dumnezeu, fund, gură, lume, pas, picior, piele, punct, timp, suflet, treabă, vorbă, veste, vânt, zi..*

It would be interesting to compare the frequency of such expressions with the English and Romanian verbs and nouns.

GERDI is written for people who have some background in the English language and also for English speakers who want to learn colloquial Romanian. The relatively non-technical language makes the book an excellent resource for students of English, translators, as well as language teachers keen on learning more idiomatic English.

We also consider this dictionary to be a special resource due to its grasping the subtle, sometimes hidden, meanings of the idioms included in that special type of intuition which may not be taught even at university level. In addition, everything in it is "fresh from the horse's mouth" (p. 10).

Săileanu and Poenaru's dictionary can be viewed as a remarkable achievement in the field of bilingual idiom dictionaries.

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