

# Animal Metaphors and Idioms in the Corpus of Bulgarian and Ukrainian Parallel Texts

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**Abstract.** In this study we examine the metaphoric mentions of three wild animals considered to be most important in the Slavic popular tradition, namely the wolf, the bear and the hare, in a Bulgarian–Ukrainian parallel corpus. Our goal is to see what meanings are found most often, how well images from alien world views are accepted by the Bulgarian and the Ukrainian linguistic consciousness, and how translators replace images which are likely not to be interpreted in the desired way.

**Keywords:** animal metaphors, text corpus, corpus linguistics, parallel texts, Bulgarian language, Ukrainian language, cultural heritage.

## 1 Introduction

Animals have a very prominent place in the Slavic popular tradition ([1]), and this is confirmed not only by the Slavic peoples' numerous beliefs and customs related to animals<sup>1</sup> but also in the vocabularies and phraseologies of the Slavic languages, which feature many metaphoric uses of words for animals, set expressions and proverbs. Because of the shared linguistic and cultural heritage, the images of animals in the various Slavic world views have much in common, but they often differ in intriguing ways. The images of the bear in Bulgarian and Russian are compared in [2], and the images of the hare in Bulgarian and Ukrainian in [3], mostly using data from explanatory and phraseological dictionaries. However, it is interesting to also look at the evidence of corpora, where language can be seen in action and the most frequent words and idioms, which describe the traits that really dominate in the animal's image, can be identified.

In this study we examine the non-literal mentions of the three wild animals that are, according to [1], the most important ones in the Slavic popular tradition, namely the **wolf**, the **bear** and the **hare**, in a Bulgarian–Ukrainian parallel corpus ([4]). The

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<sup>1</sup> Such as the presence of a Hare's Day (27 October), a Bear's Day (30 November), and Wolf Festivals (at various times) in the Bulgarian popular calendar; or the many Ukrainian popular omens connected with hare sightings in autumn and winter months.

use of translated texts allows one to see how well images from alien world views are accepted by the Bulgarian and the Ukrainian linguistic consciousness, and also how translators replace images which are likely not to be interpreted in the desired way.

## 2 The Composition of the Corpus

The bilingual corpus (CUB) consists of Bulgarian and Ukrainian parallel texts available in electronic libraries or scanned and recognised by us from paper editions. For this reason the corpus is composed of fictional works, mostly of novels, which dominate in such sources.

Because original and translated parallel texts for Ukrainian and Bulgarian are hard to come by, especially in computer-readable form and online accessibility, we also use Bulgarian and Ukrainian literary translations from other languages as corpus material. Thus CUB has several sectors, each of which covers parallel Bulgarian and Ukrainian texts with the same original language. All sectors are roughly equal in size, at present measuring approximately 800 thousand words on the Bulgarian and 700 thousand words on the Ukrainian side.<sup>2</sup> The current version of CUB includes eight sectors, i.e., as many original languages, all of them of the European continent and the Indo-European language family:

- Slavic (4)
  - the two corpus languages (Bulgarian and Ukrainian),
  - two non-corpus languages (Polish and Russian);
- non-Slavic (4)
  - two Germanic languages (English and German),
  - two Romance languages (French and Italian).

This amounts to an approximate total of 12 million words in the entire corpus. The texts are segmented into sentences through *ad hoc* software tools; the texts segmented into sentences are aligned using the program Hunalign ([5]) and the errors in the alignment are corrected manually.<sup>3</sup>

## 3 The Image of the Hare

The hare is mentioned in a non-literal sense (in similes, idioms or proverbs) on 34 occasions in CUB (on the Bulgarian or the Ukrainian side or on both).

Of these, 10 are variants of the idioms “chase two hares” (‘engage in a hopeless activity’) and “kill two hares (with one shot/bullet)” (‘kill two birds with one stone,

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<sup>2</sup> The difference is due in part to the differences in the grammatical makeup of the two languages (analytic and synthetic, respectively), in part to the stylistic preferences of many translators.

<sup>3</sup> In the case of some texts with particularly long sentences it seemed appropriate to treat semi-colons, and occasionally colons, as end-of-sentence punctuation too. Otherwise the matching portions of text could turn out to be impractically large, especially if the sentence boundaries did not coincide.

achieve two results at the same time or at the price of one’).<sup>4</sup> Five of these are present in the (Bulgarian or Russian) originals; two are introduced by Bulgarian and three by Ukrainian translators (from non-corpus languages).

- (1) Bg (original): *По такъв начин той убиваше два заека с един куршум: сееше страх и заблуди в душите на туземците и спасяваше своя авторитет.*  
Uk: *Таким чином одним пострілом він убивав двох зайців: вселяв страх і марновірство в душі тубільців і рятував свій авторитет.*  
(Marko Marchevski, *Island Tambuktu*)
- (2) Uk: *Спочатку я хотів змінити свій план і потопити їхні шлюпки, але побоююся, що Сілвер зі своєю зграєю може бути поблизу і що ми втратимо все, погнавшись за двома зайцями.*  
Bg: *Аз бях почти решил да унищожа лодките им, но се боях да не би Силвър и другите пирати да са някъде наблизо и вместо да спечелим, да загубим всичко.*  
En (original): *I had half a mind to change my plan and destroy their boats, but I feared that Silver and the others might be close at hand, and all might very well be lost by trying for too much.*  
(Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*)

To these there might be added an occasion where a character in a Ukrainian translation lit. “shoots at the wrong hare” (‘bets on the wrong horse, commits a blunder’).

- (3) Uk: *І в певному моменті хтось фатально стріляє не в того зайця.*  
Bg: *И в един момент някой прави огромния гаф.*  
It (original): *E a un certo punto qualcuno compie la gaffe madornale.*  
(Umberto Eco, *Foucault’s Pendulum*)

This unusual expression is likely a crossover of two idioms, *вбити двох зайців одним пострілом* ‘kill two hares with one shot’ and *поставити не на того коня* ‘bet on the wrong horse’. Such a linguistic deviation is made possible by the similarities between the situations and their actors (in both situations one tries to win by making a choice among two or more swift animals; in both the outcome is decided by running) and the semantic proximity of the expressions (one attempts to make an easy gain, which however depends more on luck than on effort, and loses because of a miscalculation). Whilst the first expression has been in use in Ukrainian for a long time, the second is relatively new, but it fits well into the linguistic picture thanks to the existence of such thematically related idioms as *(по)ставити на карту (щось)* ‘bet something on a card, put something on stake’ [7, p. 109], *(по)ставити на кін* ‘put something on stake’ [7, p. 163], *робити ставку на щось* ‘put one’s money on something, count on something, pin high hopes on something’ [8, p. 582].

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<sup>4</sup> According to the Ukrainian phraseological dictionary [6], the latter idiom (which describes success) is derived from the former (which predicts failure), or more precisely from the proverb *за двома зайцями погонишся, жодного не уб’єш* ‘if you go after two hares, you’ll kill neither’. Interestingly, however, in CUB there are nine occurrences of “kill two hares” and only one of “chase two hares”.

The role of the hare as a standard of cowardice is a very close second, with 9 occurrences. On six of these the image is present in the original (but one has been left out in the Ukrainian); once it has been contributed by a Bulgarian and twice by Ukrainian translators.

- (4) Uk (original): *Хіба в тебе душа? От заячий дух...*  
 Bg: *Нима е останала душа в тебе? Само заешка...*  
 (Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky, *Fata Morgana*)
- (5) Uk: *Та ні, ти навіть не ягнятко — ти щеня!*  
 Bg: *Не прилича на агне, а на зайче-бозайниче.*  
 En (original): *Your type is not a lamb, it's a sucking leveret.*  
 (Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*)
- (6) Uk: *Вони уже тікали б, як лані, [...] якби їм не перешкоджали піски.*  
 Bg: *Те цяха да бягат вече като зайци [...], — ако пясъците не им пречеха.*  
 Pl (original): *Uciekaliby już jak łanie [...] gdyby nie przeszkadzały im piaski.*  
 (Bolesław Prus, *Faraon*)

Conceivably the *sucking leveret* was replaced by Ukrainian *щеня* ‘puppy’ in (\*) because the translator felt that the connotation of all Ukrainian words for ‘little hare’ (*зайча, зайченя* etc.) was too positive for an expression of contempt, which is needed here. On the other hand, the fallow-deer were replaced by hares in (\*) because fallow-deer aren’t well known to the Bulgarian reader and wouldn’t be associated with running away in fear.

A distant third use of the image of the hare is the comparison of a character to a dog sensing or hunting a hare, which happens 4 times. All other roles in which the metaphoric hare appears in CUB are occasional, with only 1 or 2 occurrences each.

This count doesn’t include 15 mentions of lit. “solar hares” (Bulgarian *слънчево зайче*, Ukrainian *сонячний зайчик* ‘spot of reflected light’), one of Bulgarian *зайчета* ‘white horses (foam on water)’ and one of a “hare’s lip” (a birth defect). It also leaves out 12 mentions of “a hare’s face” (a grimace practiced by a character in *Heart* by Edmondo de Amicis, *il muso di lepre* in the Italian original).

The corpus also contains 7 mentions of rabbits in similes and idioms (the fact that they lose to hares five to one is in line with their relative youth as an image). In Bulgarian the rabbit is called the same as the hare (*заек*), but in Ukrainian and all other original languages they are distinguished. Their metaphoric roles are different too: the rabbit is a burrower on two occasions and a prolific multiplier on two others. The former trait is not shared by the hare, which has apparently provoked a Bulgarian translator to replace the rabbit by a mole in order to ensure the understanding of a sentence where this is crucial:

- (7) Uk: *Ти, крім [окопів], нічого й не знаєш. Родитися б тобі, Сніппі, кроликом.*  
 Bg: *Вечно все за окопи разправяш; трябвало е да се родиш къртица, Снупи.*  
 En (original): *You always want trenches; you ought to ha’ been born a rabbit, Snippy.*  
 (Herbert Wells, *War of the Worlds*)

#### 4 The Image of the Bear

The bear counts 72 non-literal mentions, that is, approximately twice more than the hare. Unlike the hare and the wolf, which are almost equally well represented on both sides of CUB, the bear appears noticeably more often in Bulgarian (69 times) than in Ukrainian (61 times).

On 16 occasions the strongest beast of Europe serves as a standard of strength (physical or, by extension, spiritual) and endurance, and appears in the original as well as the translation or translations. Nine of these are from the single source (*The Teutonic Knights* by Henryk Sienkiewicz).

- (8) Bg: *Збишко, макар и толкова силен, та изстискаше сок от пресен клон, усети, че е попаднал сякаш не в човешки, а в мечешки лапи.*  
Uk: *Хоч Збишко міг рукою видушити з гілки сік, однак відчув, ніби потрапив не в людські руки, а в ведмежі лапи.*  
Pl (original): *Lecz Zbyszko, chociaż tak krzepki, iż ścisnąwszy gałąź drzewa sok z niej wyciskał, poczuł, że dostał się jakby nie w ludzkie, ale niedźwiedzie łapy.*  
(Henryk Sienkiewicz, *The Teutonic Knights*)
- (9) Bg: *Едни казваха «с вярата си», други «с упорството си, със силата си на мечка, тръгнала вече да върви», [...]*  
Uk: *«Досяг завдяки своїй переконаності», казали одні. «Завдяки своїй завзятості, ведмежій силі, що ламає все на шляху», — казали інші.*  
Fr (original): *Les uns disaient: «à cause de sa foi», les autres: «à cause de sa ténacité, de sa puissance d'ours en marche», [...]*  
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Night Flight*)

The image of the clumsy bear is a close second, with 15 occurrences, of which 13 are present in the originals (but one has been lost in the Bulgarian and one in the Ukrainian translation) and two are added by the Bulgarian translator. Six examples are from one source (a passage from Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*).

- (10) Bg: *Когато Чичиков погледна Собакевич отстрани, този път той му се видя много приличен на мечка от средна големина.*  
Uk: *Коли Чичиков глянув скося на Собакевича, він йому цим разом здався дуже схожим на середньої величини ведмеда.*  
Ru (original): *Когда Чичиков взглянул искоса на Собакевича, он ему на этот раз показался весьма похожим на средней величины медведя.*  
(Nikolai Gogol, *Dead Souls*)
- (11) Bg: *От натрупаните на камара чували един се отмести, през дупката изпъзля наемателят и се сгромоляса тромав като мечка върху Анри.*  
Uk: *Із стоса лантухів вивалився один лантух, крізь утворену дірку виліз орендар і гепнувся згори на Анрі.*  
De (original): *Von den aufgeschichteten Säcken wurde einer herausgestoßen, durch die Lücke kroch der Pächter, ungeschlacht fiel er über Henri.*  
(Heinrich Mann, *The Youth of Henri IV*)

The tamed bear, a mighty animal turned into a spectacle, is a distant third, with 6 occurrences. On 4 occasions the bear appears as a hairy animal. All other roles are found even less often, but some are interesting as evidence of the variety of uses of the bear's name in Bulgarian, in particular in curses and in the expression *мечка се жени* (lit. “a bear is getting married”) ‘it is raining through sunshine’.

(12)Bg: *Сглутил е баща ни, сглутил е, майка му мечка.*

Uk (original): *Злегковажив наш батечко, злегковажив, трясця його матері.*  
(Vasyl Zemliak, *The Swan Flock*)

(13)Bg: *Мечка се жени! — Защо да е мечката? Напротив, слънцето се жени!...*

Uk (original): *Сліний дощ! — Чому сліний? Навпаки, ясноокий!..*  
(Oles Honchar, *Guide-on Bearers*)

The counts cited at the beginning of this section don't include 15 mentions of the constellations Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, two of plants with ‘ursine’ names (Bulgarian *мечо ухо*, Ukrainian *ведмеже вушко* ‘auricula’ and Ukrainian *ведмежина* ‘nettle’) and two of Ukrainian *ведмежа хвороба* ‘diarrhoea’, euphemistically rendered into Bulgarian as *мечо газене* ‘bear’s trampling’.

## 5 The Image of the Wolf

The wolf is mentioned 181 times in similes, idioms and proverbs, over two and a half times more often than the bear.

Here there is significantly less variety in the semantics of the metaphor: 132 times (i.e., nearly three-fourths of all) the reference is to the wolf as a fierce carnivore. These include 18 references to “a wolf’s hunger/appetite”, 9 to “a wolf’s eyes/glance” (mostly in texts with Bulgarian or Ukrainian originals) and 8 uses of the idiom “(go) into the wolf’s mouth” (half of them from *The Teutonic Knights* by Sienkiewicz).

(14)Bg: *Аз бях гладен като вълк и ядох с голям апетит.*

Uk: *[...] я з величезною охотою повечеряв, бо був голодний, як вовк.*  
En (original): *[...] and I made a hearty supper, for I was as hungry as a hawk,*  
(Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*)

This is a rare case of an image being shared by both translations but not the original text. The idiom “as hungry as a hawk”, if translated literally, would probably have been understandable (hawks are known as dangerous predators too); however, both translators preferred a more familiar image.

(15)Bg (original): *Очите на Ахмед светеха с вълчи блясък, ноздрите му се бяха издули от напрежение.*

Uk: *Очі в хлопця горіли вовчим блиском, ніздрі роздувались від збудження.*  
(Andrei Gulyashki, *Midnight Adventure*)

(16)Bg: *А кой ще ме увери, че ще се върна, ако сам вляза в устата на вълка?*

Uk: *А де ж заорука, що я повернусь, коли сам влізу вовкові в пащу?*  
Pl (original): *A kto zaś zaręczy mi, że wrócę, gdy sam wlezę wilkowi w gardziel?*  
(Henryk Sienkiewicz, *The Teutonic Knights*)

On one occasion in the Ukrainian text the ferocity has given way to being unsociable, because that is the meaning of the word *вовкуватий*, literally ‘wolfish’. To the Bulgarian translator the English word *wolfish* merely adds emphasis to the epithets already stated.

(17) Bg: *Той е жесток и безмилостен, също като вълк.*

Uk: *Ні, він жорстока, безжальна, вовкувата людина!*

En (original): [...] *he's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man.*

(Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*)

Six times a character's precarious situation is compared to an encounter with wolves, again referring to the wolf's ferocity.

(18) Bg: *По пътя вървях с чувството на млад козел, който отива при стар вълк.*

Uk: *По дорозі відчував себе молоденьким козеням, що має одвідати старого вовка.*

De (original): *Unterwegs hatte ich das Gefühl eines jüngeren Ziegenbocks, der einen alten Wolf besuchen muß.* (Erich Maria Remarque, *Three Comrades*)

On further 7 occasions dogs are likened to wolves, 5 refer to wolves howling, 3 to wolves roaming, 4 times wolves are brought up as objects rather than subjects of hunting, and on 3 occasions the idiom “lupus in fabula” comes up.

This count doesn't include 19 occurrences of the lexicalised set expression “sea wolf” ‘seasoned seaman’ (Bulgarian *морски вълк*, Ukrainian *морський вовк*), five of “wolf trap”, four of plants with ‘lupine’ names (Bulgarian *вълчи боб*, Ukrainian *вовчі боби* ‘lupin’ and Ukrainian *вовчі ягоди* ‘privet, *Ligustrum*’) and two of Ukrainian *вовчий лишай* ‘lupus erythematosus’. It also leaves out 12 uses of Ukrainian «вовк» ‘wolf’ (nearly always in quotation marks) for experienced soldiers in Oles Honchar's *Guide-on Bearers*.

## 6 Conclusions

The importance of linguo-cultural studies and the contrastive study of the etnospecifics of concepts is hardly in need of proof. Traditionally, such investigations are carried out on a lexicographical basis, and their cornerstone are explanatory dictionaries. Today it is possible to perform them not only with use of vocabularies, but also of text corpora, including comparable and parallel ones. Whilst comparable corpora allow obtaining statistical parameters of the use of specific vocabulary, in parallel corpora give a glimpse into the translators' creative laboratory. The latter was in the focus of our attention. The comparative analysis of units of Bulgarian and Ukrainian vocabulary, phraseology, and paremiology united by a common concept, done on vocabulary and corpus material, makes it possible to identify the similar and the different in the understanding of these concepts by speakers of these languages.

Many meanings recorded by dictionaries are absent from our corpus, which may, at a size of 12 million words, already constitute some indication of the frequency of their use. At the same time, the corpus illustrates meanings which are not recorded by lexicographers, in particular phraseologists. New phraseological units appear, old

ones acquire new meanings or shades of meanings, and these corpus data need lexicographing. Also interesting are the cases where the expressions under consideration are only found on one side of the corpus. You really never know where the hare will rush out from.

Regarding the semantic features of the thematic groups studied, we saw that in both languages the hare is perceived primarily through the prism of the saying “A man who chases two hares catches none” and as a standard of cowardice; the bear is powerful but clumsy (the latter more in the Bulgarian world view than in the Ukrainian one) and the wolf is fierce and permanently hungry (again, the latter more in Bulgarian than in Ukrainian). Specific meanings (such as “hare” in the sense of ‘novice’ in Bulgarian or ‘fare-dodger’ in Ukrainian) are found much more seldom.

## 7 Future Work

Although at its present size CUB can already be used for comparative research of vocabulary and phraseology, the reliability of the results of such research should grow with the volume of the corpus, and could benefit from a better balance of texts of different fictional genres across its various sectors. At the same time, it would be expedient to study the distribution of meanings of the lexical items of interest in comparable and large monolingual corpora and compare the results.

The inclusion of other animals important in the Bulgarian and Ukrainian world view and frequently mentioned in discourse in these languages is a further obvious direction in which the investigation can develop.

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