

## English & Spanish Phraseology: A Translation and Lexicographic Perspective

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### Resumen

En este trabajo se abordan algunas cuestiones teóricas en el análisis de la fraseología contrastiva y se centra en los problemas que se plantean en relación con la búsqueda de equivalentes adecuados desde una perspectiva funcional y cognitiva en la primera parte con locuciones en ambas lenguas. La segunda parte del estudio versa sobre la selección y uso de los proverbios más comunes en las dos lenguas (el mínimo paremiológico). Se exponen los criterios para el establecimiento de dicho mínimo, discutiendo algunos puntos de contacto y diferente entre ambos idiomas.

La autora concluye que el tratamiento de estas unidades fraseológicas y refranes en los diccionarios bilingües sigue siendo insuficiente.

**Palabras clave:** locuciones, refranes, traducción, análisis funcional y cognitivo.

### Abstract

This paper addresses some theoretical issues in cross-linguistic phraseology (idioms and collocations)<sup>1</sup> analysis and focuses on problems which arise in connection with finding adequate equivalents from a functional and cognitive perspective. The second part of the paper focuses on the selection and use of the most common proverbs in the two languages (*the paremiological minimum*). Criteria for establishing this paremiological minimum in both languages is shown, discussing some points of contact and departure between the two languages.

The author concludes that the treatment of these phraseological units and proverbs in bilingual dictionaries is still inadequate.

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<sup>1</sup> Phraseology is not clearly defined in the literature, covering different realities for different linguists. Some limit phraseology to fixed expressions or *idioms* whose definition is “a sequence of words which has a different meaning as a group from the meaning it would have if you understood each word separately” (Longman Idioms Dictionary, vii). Still others, like Benson, Benson and Ilson (1986) include collocations, that is, word combinations which are usual in the language but not fixed as idioms. We adopt the latter’s approach for this paper regarding both collocations and idioms as phraseological units.

**Keywords:** Idioms, Proverbs, Translation, Functional and Cognitive Analysis.

## 1. Introduction: Contrasting English-Spanish Collocations, Idioms and Proverbs

The key role of phraseology in language use has been recognised by several distinguished linguists during the last century. The aim of this paper is two-fold: to describe idioms and proverbs from a contrastive perspective English-Spanish.

Glässer (1994/1995:46-58) has studied phraseology in English basing her classification on the notions of “centre” and “periphery” from the Prague school. The **centre** comprises phraseological units that function like single words such as nouns (*blind alley*), verbs (*make assumptions, make choices*), etc.; function words that denote relations between phenomena or objects (prepositions: *by dint of, in terms of/* conjunctions: *in order to, as if*) and Glässer also includes some blexemic units (*blanket cover*) but eliminates others (*man-made, milkman*). The **transition area** includes ‘irreversible binomials’ (word pairs which have a fixed order such as *bread and butter*), stereotyped combinations or similes (*as cold as a cucumber*), sentence-like, fragments of sentence-like phrases (*a rolling stone*), quotations and literary allusions (*Scylla and Charibdis* situation) and finally, collocations. Last but not least, the **periphery** includes proverbs, truisms (*boys will be boys*), maxims, quotations, slogans and routine formulae (*what’s up?*).

Glässer’s typology is fairly complete but it has the disadvantage of treating idioms and collocations fairly similarly and such distinctions (units with a unified meaning vs. units more loosely combined) are important in translation, as will be seen below.

Given the peculiarities of phraseological units in English and Spanish, one should expect they would be the focus of much attention on the part of bilingual lexicographers, but this is not normally the case in general nor specialized dictionaries. It is still rare to find quotations, proverbs such as *the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence* (or fragments), stereotyped comparisons or slogans in them. Collocations, proverbs and idioms are grouped pell-met along with other phraseological units. The comparison of these multiword units requires taking into account key notions in Semantics, Syntax, Pragmatics and Cognitive Linguistics. These parameters are discussed below.

### 1.1. Semantics

The content plane of idioms consists of two macro-components: figurative and mental image. These two elements are independent of each other to a certain extent. In consequence, there are some idioms which have almost the same image but differ with

regard to their actual meanings, as well as idioms which have (nearly) the same actual meaning, but differ in regard to their images (*snail pace* > *paso de tortuga*), being the latter's literal translation into English "turtle pace".

Let us examine firstly idioms which are characterized by the similarity of images and non-parallel features of the actual meaning. The most striking cases of non-equivalence of this kind are the so-called "false friends". Consider the English collocation "table of contents" and its Spanish pseudo-equivalent *tabla de contenidos*. Both multiword units are made up of similar constituents and have an identical image basis. Nevertheless, there are some differences in their actual meaning. The Spanish expression can refer to "contents" or "a statistical table" whereas the English expression only refers to contents. These phraseological "false friends" resemble each other on the level of constituent part and mental images. Consequently, we need a semantic and conceptual analysis of given idioms, for example, in terms of the cognitive theory of metaphor.

Secondly, there are idioms which have the same core meaning but differ in regard to their images. The meanings of given L1 and L2 idioms differ only a little and generally in peripheral elements of their semantics. Thus, *caer chuzos de punta* ('chuck it down') denotes a special kind of risk, namely a risk of being hit by a stick (*chuzo*). The British English colloquial expression "chuck it down" does not presuppose any risk and it is possible to say in English something like "pouring with rain" which could be translated back into Spanish as *llover a cántaros* > *pour with rain, rain cats and dogs*. It is interesting to note that the Spanish idiom *caer chuzos de punta* is nowadays opaque for many young people as they do not know what a "chuzo" is. Contrary to standard assumptions, both languages share a common property: opaque idioms such as this one are rare and that most idiomatic expressions enjoy at least some degree of transparency (table 1).

to lay one's cards on the table > poner las cartas sobre la mesa
to stab s.o. in the back > apuñalar a alguien por la espalda.
to miss the boat > perder el tren
to have one's feet on the ground > tener los pies en el suelo.
to cost an arm and a leg > costar un riñón
to add fuel to the fire > echar leña al fuego
to be in the same boat > estar en el mismo barco

Table 1. Idioms with a degree of transparency in English and Spanish.

Thirdly, there are L1 idioms which have more than one meaning whereas the corresponding L2 idiom has only one meaning. Their contrastive description and the relevant dictionary entries have to contain information about such cross-linguistic asymmetry. Examples of this kind can be taken from the Spanish idiom *dejar tieso, -a*. According to the Longman *Advanced Dictionary English-Spanish/ Spanish-English*, it has two meanings: 1. 'bleed sb. white', and 2. (slang) 'bump sb. off' but it has also a third meaning "leave sb. stunned". Thus, bilingual dictionaries such as this one which consider "dejar tieso" as a equivalent of "bump sb. off, do sb. in" or "bleed sb. white" provide the user with misleading information.

Fourthly, there are idioms of SL and TL which are similar with regard to their actual meanings, but differ as to their images. For example, in standard contexts the English idiom *silence is golden* means "keeping quiet is a good idea" can be translated into Spanish by the idiom *en boca cerrada no entran moscas* (literally, "if you keep your mouth shut, flies will not get in") evoking a mental image of a situation where silence is advisable.

## 1.2. Syntax

The most prototypical property of idioms is that they have restricted syntactic flexibility. Thus, *to kick the bucket* is syntactically fixed and cannot be transformed into a passive \*the bucket was kicked or \*The bucket, Mary kicked. However, there is a cline in fixedness as other idioms behave differently. Examples from corpora clearly show that there is also considerable variation in the morphological form of the verbs and in the choice of determiners in the noun phrases. Examples 1-3 have been taken from the BNC:

1. (...)I just thought it might be nice to **give him a break** away from home  
(*CONV*)
2. She was going off for short stays at the Home, and then every weekend **to give me a break** (*ACAD*)
3. It **will give you a break** from the restrictions that have been placed upon you and will enable you to see how you get on your own! (*BOOK*).

Due to space constraint, some examples are shown below of one of the most productive syntactic patterns in idioms, **verb +noun phrase**. The most common types are the following:

- 1) The leading verb is followed by a direct object and further optional modifiers.

*To build castles in the air* (make unrealistic plans)> 'hacer castillos en el aire', *to*

*blow off steam* (to rid oneself of one's indignation)> 'desahogarse, put on airs' (to assume fancy manners)> 'darse aires de importancia', *promise the moon* (promise difficult things to anybody)> 'prometer la luna'.

Notice that the definite article in the last example cannot be changed by an indefinite one, a negative or a quantifier in English or Spanish (\* a/no/ every moon > 'una/ ninguna/ cualquier'), which confirms the literal interpretation of this noun.

- 2) Idioms which function like intransitive verbs: *carry coals to Newcastle*> 'ir a vendimiar y llevar uvas de postre'; *have an axe to grind* >'tener un interés personal/ ni me va ni me viene'; *burn the candle at both ends*> 'tratar de abarcar demasiado, hacer de la noche día'.
- 3) Idioms which function like transitive verbs: *give X the cold shoulder*>*hacerle el vacío a alguien* ;*pull X's leg*> *tomar a alguien el pelo*; *have a stab at*> *apuñalar a*, *play havoc with*>*trastocar o desbaratar algo*; *can't make head nor tail of*> 'no tener ni pies ni cabeza'(this one has no passive). On the other hand, some expressions passivize freely in English and Spanish: *bear something in mind*>'tener en cuenta', *nip something in the bud* >'cortar algo de raíz', *settle a score*> 'anotarse un tanto'.
- 4) Idioms which function like a clause without tense: *It rains cats and dogs*> *llover a cántaros*, *the coast (will) be clear*> *no hay moros en la costa*.
- 5) Other idioms are quite flexible syntactically and their degree of syntactic flexibility is related strongly to the level of analysability of an idiom: the more analysable they are, the more syntactic flexibility they exhibit. Idioms classified as analysable and transparent have constituents that map directly onto their respective idiomatic referents. For example: in *call a spade a spade*, the verb *call* maps to its referent 'to name' and the noun phrase 'a spade' maps precisely to 'spade', meaning the whole expression 'to call a thing by its own name'.
- 6) Constructions with a semantically empty 'light' verb such as *have, make or take* (*have a drink*) and a singular indefinite NP denoting actions that can also be referred to by verbs that are homophonous with the nouns in the VPs : (drink). These expressions form a cline of idiomaticity from clearly idiomatic expressions (*take time, have a look*) to relatively idiomatic expressions such as *have a chance, take a walk, make a statement* where the meaning of individual words is retained up to a certain extent and having at the other extreme expressions that retain the core meaning of these verbs (Biber 1999: 1027) : *you can **take** a snack in your pocket, he **made** a sandwich*.

These constructions exhibit a high degree of syntactic and semantic flexibility, similar to non-idiomatic strings. There are relatively few idioms of this kind whose dictionary form shows an indefinite NP (Fellbaum 1988:288). Some examples are *make a scene*, *smell a rat*, *weave a rug*. Note that some of these idioms can undergo passivization or topicalization: *What a scene he made when he was fired!* The use of the indefinite article indicates that the NPs in these idioms function as metaphors and have a referent, but only in composition with the particular verbs. The NP in the example above has a referent whose meaning is related to *theatre*. Last but not least, it should be noted that some phraseological units of this sort are conventionally negative such as *make no odds* > *no me importa/ me da igual/ me da lo mismo*.

### 1.3. Pragmatics

The pragmatic taxonomy is less developed in the literature. The focus here again will be the pragmatic notions which can help for the translation of idioms in the two languages. One of the most representative works are Hieke and Lattey (1983) and Lattey (1986) which use the concept of pragmatic focus for their classification. If the focus is on the individual, we get expressions such as *throw in the towel, be knackered*; if it is the world: *to go down the drain*; the interaction among individuals: *tirarse los trastos a la cabeza(fam)* > 'to have a fight, have a blazing or flaming row', 'win sb's heart' or the interaction of persons with the world *comerse el mundo* > take on the world. These groups are subdivided in positive, negative or neuter, according to the result of the action with the addressor, the addressee or a third party. For example *to pull sb's leg*, or *to laugh in sb's face* are included in the NEGATIVE INTERACTION among individuals' category. In practice, however, the distinction becomes blurred, and it is not always possible to identify the exact nature and locus of the evaluation. Moon (1998:247) offers an example: *wash one's hands of something/ someone*, an idiom which denotes 'giving up'. Such an action may be perceived as good or bad, the subject of the verb as right or wrong, and the object of the preposition as bad or good according to the sympathies of the speaker/writer.

Even when an idiomatic equivalent of these idioms is proposed by a dictionary, the TL equivalent provided may not fit as naturally into the TL content as the SL phraseological unit. For instance, *hijo de puta* in Spanish is normally rendered as *son of a bitch, bastard* in English but these are far less used than its Spanish counterpart. For example, this expression is used among young people as a greeting meaning no offence in Andalusia. No information of this sort is included in standard bilingual dictionaries, however. Strässler (1982:119), quite rightly, says: 'when applied to idioms, the two requirements of the

maxim of quality read as follows:

1. Do not use an idiom if you believe you are in a social situation which does not allow such usage.
2. Do not use idioms if you are not sure about the present social situation'

In this way, the demands of frequency and politeness in several contexts can be met. Indeed, context plays a more important role in the rendering of phraseological units than in that of simple lexemes, as the phraseological unit has its own structure that has to fit in the larger structure of the sentence. From this specific context, the translation procedures vary. In what follows, I am going to show some textual binomials in order to illustrate several translation strategies and the functioning of the phraseological competence.

The most traditional translation procedure is the use of *equivalence* or the substitution of the SL (Source Language) phraseological unit for a supposed equivalent in the TL (Target Language). In the first example: *She was pushing up daisies*> *estaba criando malvas*, the metaphorical image and the lexical composition is fairly similar (*malvas* backtranslates into English as *mallows*). However, this procedure does not always offer an adequate solution, despite the phraseological unit has been recognized and interpreted in its co-text. It may happen that we get an infra-translation or over-translation of certain pragmatic aspects of the phraseological unit. Corpas (2003:314-5) gives an example with the Spanish *salir por peteneras* ('to say something silly') which implies an absurd and senseless action done on purpose which was translated into English by *miss the point* which implies a silly but *totally involuntary* action.

Sometimes the phraseological unit is replaced by a single word (non-phraseological equivalence) or a neutralization of phraseological meanings in context takes place. In the Oxford Superlex dictionary we find *to be right up sb's alley* translated as *ser un trabajo ideal para algn.* which misses the colloquial connotations of this American English idiom. On certain occasions, the phraseological unit is totally omitted because the translator considers that its translation is irrelevant or it is impossible to transfer it into another culture (some Spanish idioms related to bullfighting i.e. *ver los toros desde la barrera* implies that you watch something from the sidelines but you neither want to get involved nor give your opinion about it, keeping out of that business). This evaluative proverb clearly shows an appeal to authority and the contextual ideology, it alludes to a socio-cultural schema where the stereotype is that bullfighters in the real world *do* see bulls in front of them and not from the barrier. This course of action is accepted as wise or

advisable by the Spanish culture (albeit only in certain situations such as *sanfermines*, the festivity in Pamplona in which bulls are run through the streets or bullfights). So, if you are not a bullfighter, then it is advisable “to watch things from the sidelines”. This Spanish schema is rhetorically powerful, coercing agreement.

Although it may seem strange, a very frequent translation procedure for translating phraseological units from English into Spanish is calques. This strategy maintains the original source culture, making the translator “visible”. Thus, the locution *the genuine article* in the sentence: ‘Often products are sold at, or near to, the price of the genuine article’ was translated in an Economics text as “el artículo genuino” although there is a possible Spanish equivalence *auténtico* (> ‘authentic’).

The translation of phraseological units may even get more difficult when the SL author manipulates them for rhetorical discourse purposes, which is fairly usual in several texts (Moon, 1998; Wotjak 1992). Such contextual changes depend on the supposed semantic and formal stability that characterizes these units and on the previous recognition of the original units that function as a base<sup>2</sup>. As an example, the Spanish idiom *no dejar ni a sol ni a sombra* (‘not to give sb a moment’s peace, not to leave sb alone for a minute’) is reduced in the verbal component in ‘Ni a sol ni a sombra la deja en paz’ (> ‘He never gives her alone for a minute’) which reinforces the tenacity, insistency and constancy implicit somehow in such locution. Out of context, the phrasal verb *let up* cannot be accepted as the corresponding phraseological equivalence of the Spanish unit.

Last but not least, many uses of phraseological units are related to the pragmatics of politeness. Many are used to preserve or threaten face, establishing social relationships (Strässler 1982:126 ff.) For example: *he gets on my nerves* reflects the power relationship of the discourse participants. Phraseological units may be also used in the first and second person, generally used as mitigators, or in expressions of solidarity and sympathy such as in the following example quoted in Moon, 263 ‘Then you’ve got **a real hot spot in your hands**, don’t you?’, which can be translated into Spanish “tener un punto de fricción/motivo de discordia”, also showing solidarity with your interlocutor.

The selection of phraseological units such as this one acknowledges common ground between discourse participants by appealing to shared sociocultural schemas and evaluations. They allow evaluations to be expressed politely and also intensify solidarity between speaker and hearer, establishing an intimacy and conversational tone.

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<sup>2</sup> See Delabastida (1988) for the translation of manipulated phraseological units.

#### 1.4. Idioms from a Cognitive Perspective: The Case of Metaphors

The proper understanding of idioms draws on basic cognition, on perception, memory and categorization (Croft and Cruise, 2004; Langacker, 2000; Taylor, 2002). Cognition, society, culture and history are intertwined in rich, complex and dynamic ways in language, so an understanding of idioms requires integrating them. This is particularly relevant with figurative idioms.

Deignan (2005) has got a chapter on idioms and their metaphorical value from a corpus perspective. It is also interesting to compare if the same metaphorical value is applied or not from a contrastive perspective. Some of examples chosen at random of the commonest idioms in the English language<sup>3</sup> are discussed below and their translation into Spanish in two of the most widely-used and up-dated bilingual dictionaries (*Gran Diccionario Oxford español-inglés* and *Diccionario Longman Advanced English-Spanish/ Spanish-English*, henceforward GDO and LAES respectively). The results show that the phraseological units are not treated systematically and that the authors sometimes indicate that an idiom can be translated both literally and metaphorically but they also omit too this vital information from time to time and they do not provide all the different translations that different registers allow (viz. to bite the bullet >*hacer de tripas corazón, apechugar*).

English idioms	GDO	LAES
<i>Hot air</i>	es pura palabrería/ es puro bla, bla, bla (coll.)	----
<i>Up in arms</i>	estar furioso con/ poner el grito en el cielo.	protestar por /rebelarse contra algo; poner el grito contra algo.
<i>A blind alley</i>	callejón sin salida	callejón sin salida
<i>Not take no for an answer</i>	-----	----
<i>Up the ante</i>	subir la apuesta inicial	a) subir, aumentar la apuesta; b) aumentar exigencias.
<i>Foot the bill</i>	pagar, apoquinar (coll.)	----
<i>A safe bet</i>	es seguro que...	una apuesta segura
<i>In cold blood/ cold-blooded</i>	a sangre fría ( <i>killer</i> ) despiadado, cruel, desalmado	a sangre fría, despiadado, cruel
<i>Call someone's bluff</i>	poner a alguien en evidencia	desafiar a alguien que cumpla una amenaza (que creemos que no va a cumplir)
<i>Bite the bullet</i>	hacer de tripas corazón	apechugar (coll.)
<i>A change of heart</i>	----	un cambio de opinión/ parecer/ actitud.

<sup>3</sup> Relatively common idioms in *The Bank of English* and *the British National Corpus*.

<i>Have a card up your sleeve</i>	tener algo planeado (coll.)	---
<i>Make a splash</i>	producir o causar un revuelo	causar sensación
<i>Follow suit</i>	seguir su ejemplo, hacer lo mismo (lit., in cards) jugar una carta del mismo palo/ seguir el palo.	a) (naipes) jugar una carta del mismo palo, arrastrar; b) (fig.) seguir el ejemplo, hacer lo mismo.
<i>In full swing</i>	estar en pleno desarrollo/ estar muy animado/ estar en plena época de.	estar en pleno apogeo (fiesta)
<i>On the table</i>	proponer algo/ sobre el tapete.	sobre la mesa/ el tapete (asunto para su discusión)
<i>Keep tabs on someone</i>	llevar la cuenta de/ vigilar	---
<i>In the throes of something</i>	en trance de/ estar sumido en/ estar en medio de.	---
<i>The thumbs up</i>	---	---
<i>Sit tight</i>	no te muevas (coll.)	a) quedarse en su sitio/ no moverse b) mantenerse firme/ en su trece (obstinarse)
<i>Walk a tightrope</i>	caminar por la cuerda floja	(fig.) estar en la cuerda floja.

Table 2. Some Common English Idioms and Their Translations in GDO and LAES.

A cursory glance at this table reveals that bilingual dictionaries include common sets of predictable collocations and idioms, but do not take account of many unpredictable ones, nor all sets of predictable ones. If translators and users of an L2 develop a consciousness of the phraseological units, this may mean a better grasp of their own speech as well as to an improved contrastive knowledge of languages. In this sense, our analysis of certain collocations and idioms cross-linguistically from a semantic, syntactic, pragmatic and cognitive point of view has attempted a deeper understanding of the frequency of such a relatively neglected usage phenomenon in English and Spanish.

## 2. Contrastive Analysis of Proverbs in Spanish and English: Some Common Strategies in the two languages

When English and Spanish speakers use a common proverb, rather than speaking for themselves, they quote the wisdom of the community at large and endorse the authority of tradition. These proverbs count as indirect speech acts, allowing the speaker to go “off the record” (Brown y Levinson, 1987). The most common English and Spanish proverbs display some semantic properties such polysemy, pun, metonymy, hyperbole, irony, tautology, connotation, etc. based on Norrick (1985: 391-392). Attention will be paid here just to the first three due to space limitations:

### Polysemy

The polysemy of the proverb *Don't count your chickens before they hatch* is interpreted literally by young children using the interpreting strategies of problem-solving and and by its standard interpretation 'To exhibit over-confidence before completing a task'. Both hearers interpret the proverb interactionally to mean that over-confidence can hamper completing any task. The imagery changes in Spanish 'No hay que vender la piel del oso antes de cazarlo' [literal translation: Don't sell the bear's skin until you hunt it]

### Pun

A few proverbs have puns. Such is the case with *If reasons were as plentiful as blackberries, I would give no man a reason on compulsion* (*Henry IV, ll.iv.237-238*). This is Falstaff's response to Prince Hal's request for a 'reason', that is, he makes fun of the prince, denigrating reason or rational discourse changing "raisins" for "reasons". If Hal's request were for raisins, they are as cheap and plentiful as are reasons for the defenders of the status quo, those in power.

### Metonymy

Some proverbs involve metonymies as well. *Absence makes the heart grow fonder* relates a specific part of the body, the heart, with love. This proverb in Spanish contains a simile 'la ausencia es al amor lo que al fuego el aire: que apaga el pequeño y aviva el grande' [literal translation: Absence is to love like fire to air: it puts out a small one but it intensifies a big one]. Similarly, *Two heads are better than one* indicate that some difficult situations may be solved more easily by two (or more) people working together than by one working alone (Moon 1998:194). This proverb uses a different metonymy in Spanish: 'Cuatro ojos ven más que dos' [Four eyes see more than two].

## 2.1. Selecting the most common Proverbs in English

In order to select the most common proverbs in English (the paremiological minimum), three criteria were combined to design a questionnaire filled by thirteen Native Speakers:

- a. Mieder's paremiological minimum (2004)
- b. Standard Dictionaries of English Proverbs
- c. Internet Frequency of these proverbs, mainly using Google and two web pages with selected proverbs<sup>4</sup>. Both pages have the same aim: to make

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<sup>4</sup> Google provides relevant information about proverb usage and frequency that is missing in monolingual corpora (CREA for Spanish and The BNC for English) and dictionaries. For example, the English proverb *You can't compare apples and oranges (it's like comparing apples and oranges)* is translated into Spanish as *no se puede comparar las churras con las merinas*. *Churra* backtranslates into English as *Kempy wool* and *merino=merino*. Both proverbs do not appear in standard bilingual dictionaries, which is not surprising as this Spanish

Spanish speakers get used to English proverbs. Frequency of usage and/ or familiarity of English speakers with the proverbs are key factors for the proverbs' selection. Otherwise, a selection for Second Language purposes would be meaningless. However, both pages do not state their selection criteria, it is implicit.

The proverb pages are:

<http://cogweb.ucla.edu/Discourse/Proverbs/English-Spanish.html>

Berta Alicia Chen's page proposes an equivalent proverb or functional translation.

<http://www.englishdaily626.com/proverbs.php>

English daily contains the 186 most common proverbs taught to Spanish students of English.

Out of these pages, a preliminary selection of 50 proverbs to be evaluated by the interviewees was set up, as a bigger number of proverbs could have meant that some people would have refused to complete the questionnaire. The selection of these fifty proverbs was also based on their frequency using Google, that is, those proverbs that appeared in more than 100.000 contexts. Eventually, the final number of most frequent proverbs is 51, with more than 101.000 hits; the next proverbs being at a further distance, 70.000 contexts.

Proverbs were ordered at random in the questionnaire.

1. Between the devil and the deep (blue) sea
2. Where there is a will there is a way
3. First come, first served
4. A friend in need is a friend indeed
5. Better late than never
6. Birds of a feather flock together
7. Charity begins at home
8. Every cloud has a silver lining
9. All that glitters is not gold
10. Every dog has its day
11. Actions speak louder than words
12. God helps those who help themselves
13. Great minds think alike
14. Jack of all trades and master of none

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adage is culture-bound. The English proverb has 4,920 tokens in Google and the Spanish one 11,400 tokens but both are not found in the two corpora mentioned above.

15. No news is good news
16. Necessity is the mother of invention
17. Once bitten twice shy
18. Practice makes perfect
19. Prevention is better than cure
20. Robbing Peter to pay Paul
21. [Speech is silver], silence is golden
22. Strike while the iron is hot
23. There's no smoke without fire
24. When in Rome do as the Romans do
25. Absence makes the heart grow fonder
26. Don't judge a book by its cover
27. Blood is thicker than water
28. Don't make a mountain out of a molehill
29. Experience is the best teacher
30. Make hay while the sun shines
31. Out of sight, out of mind
32. Don't put the cart before the horse
33. The sky is the limit
34. Money is the root of all evil
35. An apple a day keeps the doctor away
36. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder
37. Beggars can't be choosers
38. Curiosity killed the cat
39. Grin and bear it
40. Home is where the heart is
41. Many hands make light work
42. A stitch in time saves nine
43. Time heals old wounds
44. The truth will out
45. The way to a man's heart is through his stomach
46. Love will find a way
47. Better late than never
48. Let sleeping dogs lie
49. Never say die

- 50. Each to his own
- 51. Give a thing and take a thing, to wear the devil's gold ring
- 52. It's not the end of the world

*Better late than never*, was repeated twice to verify the data, that is, if participants classify this proverb in the same way, it means that the classification is reliable. All participants classified this item accordingly.

Results reveal that the most common proverbs for those polled are nº18, *Practice makes perfect* (61, 54%, followed by nº 52, *It's not the end of the World*, (53, 85%) and nº 5, *Better late than never* ( 46,5 %).

Among those frequently used by the interviewees are Proverb nº 3, *First come, first served*, nº 21, [*Speech is silver*], *Silence is golden*, and nº 2, *Where there is a will there is a way* (46,15% usage), followed by proverbs 13, 14, 25 y 35, *Great minds think alike*, *Jack of all trades and master of none*, *Absence makes the heart grow fonder* y *An apple a day keeps the doctor away*, (38,46 %).

Among the proverbs they never use are: proverb nº 2. *Where there is a will there is a way*; 5. *Better late than never*; 8. *Every cloud has a silver lining*; 11. *Actions speak louder than words*; 14. *Jack of all trades and master of none*; 15. *No news is good news*; 18. *Practice makes perfect*; 19. *Prevention is better than cure*; 24. *When in Rome do as the Romans do*; 25. *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*; 26. *Don't judge a book by its cover*; 27. *Blood is thicker than water*; 28. *Don't make a mountain out of a molehill*; 31. *Out of sight, out of mind*; 33. *The sky is the limit*; 34. *Money is the root of all evil*; 37. *Beggars can't be choosers*; 38. *Curiosity killed the cat*.

Finally, among those they never use but they know are proverbs nº 5. *Better late than never*; 15. *No news is good news*; 31. *Out of sight, out of mind*; 50. *Each to his own*; 52. *It's not the end of the world*.

Proverbs known and used by those polled which they included in the survey are:

1. First things first.
2. Sticks and stones may hurt my bones but words will never hurt me.
3. Finders keepers, losers weepers.
4. More haste, less speed.
5. The early bird catches the worm.
6. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
7. Waste not, want not.
8. All's well that ends well.

9. Least said, soonest mended.
10. Give an inch, take a mile.
11. There is a method in/to my/his/her madness.
12. You're /he/she/ is barking up the wrong tree.
13. Like a fish out of water.
14. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.
15. An idle mind is the devil's workshop.
16. Procrastination is the thief of time.
17. Familiarity breeds contempt.
18. The early bird catches the worm.
19. It's the pot calling the kettle black.
20. It's like taking coals to Newcastle.
21. First you work and then you play.
22. Between a rock and a hard place.
23. [To be]The apple of his/her eye.

These proverbs mean an extra 44% to the total number of known and used proverbs . It is hard to know their frequency of use. The results of the questionnaire may indicate that Native English speakers seldom use proverbs but there are a few that are used again and again. This entails a progressive loss of proverbs coupled with a more fine-grained use of just quite a few.

From a lexicographer's and bilingual paremiologist's perspective, the translation of these common proverbs entails three different translation strategies shown in table 3.

**i-Literal translation,**

ii- **Functional equivalence** (when the Spanish proverbs are translated by equivalent idioms in English as no corresponding English proverbs are found) as in the following examples: Aquí hay gato encerrado >*there's something fishy going on*

Al final nos llevamos el gato al agua>*We pulled it off in the end.*

Como gato panza arriba>*go on the defensive.*

iii- **For Culture-bound metaphors,** the translator has to look for the corresponding target language metaphor/ metonymy:

No hay mal que por bien no venga> *Every cloud has a silver lining.*

Más vale lo malo conocido que lo bueno por conocer> *Better the devil you know (than the devil you don't).*

Table 3. Translation Strategies for Proverbs.

## 2.2. Translation of Spanish into English Proverbs

Proverb usage in spoken Spanish is backing down clearly. Spanish old people use proverbs less and less everyday and young people barely use them at all, they only recognize some when they hear or see them in quotations. This decline is a recurrent topic in paremiology. That is the reason why several Spanish researchers have tried to preserve this important cultural legacy<sup>5</sup>. Proverb dictionaries are an important means to this end. However, it is easy to detect old-fashioned proverbs in these dictionaries and there is hardly any information about their currency in present Spanish. These proverb dictionaries are organized by onomasiological order or by topics. Some of the most popular ones are the following:

- Luis Martínez Kleiser, *Refranero General Ideológico Español* (1989),
- María Josefa Canellada y Berta Pallares, *Refranero español. Refranes, clasificación, significación y uso* (2001),
- Regino Etxabe Díaz, *Gran Diccionario de refranes* (2001),
- Delfín Carbonell Basset, *Diccionario panhispánico de refranes* (2002),
- Editorial Libsa, *El gran libro de los refranes* (2004),
- Manuel Martín Sánchez, *Refranes para la vida cotidiana* (2006),
- Concepción Masiá Vericat, *El gran libro de los refranes* (2007).

These dictionaries sometimes contain both idioms and proverbs grouped pell-mell. Such is the case with *Diccionario temático de frases hechas* (2004) and Alberto Buitrago's, *Diccionario de dichos y frases hechas* (2008). There are other occasions when the proverbs are given predominance, as in *Diccionario de refranes, dichos y proverbios* by Luis Junceda (2006).

The UCM 90235 Phraseology and Paremiology Research Group have established that the Spanish paremiological minimum consists of approximately four hundred proverbs. This minimum has been established by means of surveys, written and oral texts and studying the dictionaries mentioned in the classification above. Among those four hundred proverbs, forty examples are included here by onomasiological order with their English translations in table 4. Some are a good reflection of the Spanish History and cultural

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<sup>5</sup> The most outstanding paremiological groups in Spanish are mainly *Grupo UCM 90235 Fraseología y Paremiología* and *PHRASEONET (Universidad de Santiago de Compostela)*.

background: The Inquisition (proverb nº3), Catholicism (proverbs 3, 16, 17, 36). The rest of proverbs reveal different aspects of everyday life: love and family (proverbs 18, 27, 40), human relationships (proverbs 7, 28, 31, 34), work (proverbs 6, 23, 38) and material culture (2, 4, 5, 8). These culture-specific proverbs are translated into English with a totally different conceptual background: *Por el hilo se saca el ovillo* > 'There is no smoke without fire'. However, there are some cases when the conceptual base is the same and a literal translation is provided: *El tiempo es oro* > 'Time is money'.

Spanish Proverb	English Proverb
1. A buen entendedor, pocas palabras bastan.	<i>A word to the wise is enough.</i>
2. A buen hambre no hay pan duro.	<i>Hunger is not dainty.</i>
3. A buenas horas, mangas verdes.	<i>Don't lock the barn door after the horse has bolted.</i>
4. A caballo regalado, no le mires el diente.	<i>Never look a gift horse in the mouth.</i>
5. A cada cerdo le llega su San Martín.	<i>Every hog has its Martinmas.</i>
6. A Dios rogando y con el mazo dando.	<i>I thank God and my cunning (archaic).</i>
7. A enemigo que huye, puente de plata.	<i>For a fleeing enemy, make a golden bridge.</i>
8. A falta de pan, buenas son tortas.	<i>Those who have no meat, bread and butter are glad to eat.</i>
9. A la fuerza ahorcan.	<i>Needs must when the devil drives.</i>
10. A la ocasión la pintan calva.	<i>Make hay while the sun shines.</i>
11. A la tercera va la vencida.	<i>Third time lucky.</i>
12. A la vejez, viruelas.	<i>There is no fool like an old fool.</i>
13. A lo hecho, pecho	<i>Don't cry over spilt milk.</i>
14. A mal tiempo, buena cara	<i>To put on a brave face.</i>
15. A otro perro con ese hueso	<i>Tell it to the marines!</i>
16. A quien Dios se la dé, San Pedro se la bendiga	<i>If the shoe fits, wear it</i>
17. A quien madruga, Dios le ayuda.	<i>God helps those who help themselves.</i>
18. A rey muerto, rey puesto.	<i>The King is dead. God save the King.</i>
19. A río revuelto, ganancia de pescadores.	<i>It's good fishing in troubled waters.</i>

Spanish Proverb	English Proverb
20. Abril, aguas mil.	<i>April showers bring May flowers.</i>
21. Afortunado en el juego, desgraciado en amores.	<i>Lucky at cards, unlucky in love.</i>
22. Agua pasada no mueve molino.	<i>The mill cannot grind with water that is past.</i>
23. Agua que no has de beber, déjala correr	<i>Don't scald your lips with another man's pottage (archaic).</i>
24. Al pan, pan, y al vino, vino	<i>To call a spade a spade.</i>
25. Ande yo caliente, y ríase la gente.	<i>Comfort is better than pride.</i>
26. Antes es la obligación que la devoción.	<i>Business before pleasure.</i>
27. Año nuevo, vida nueva.	<i>New year, new life.</i>
28. Arrieros somos, y en el camino nos encontraremos.	<i>Revenge is a dish that can be eaten cold.</i>
29. Aunque la mona se vista de seda, mona se queda.	<i>You can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear.</i>
30. Bicho malo nunca muere.	<i>A bad thing never dies.</i>
31. Cada loco con su tema.	<i>Everyone talks of what he loves.</i>
32. Cada maestrillo tiene su librillo.	<i>There are more ways than one to skin a cat.</i>
33. Cada mochuelo a su olivo.	<i>Night brings the crows home.</i>
34. Cada oveja con su pareja.	<i>Like will to like.</i>
35. (que) cada palo aguante su vela.	<i>As you make your bed, so you must lie on it.</i>
36. Cada uno en su casa, y Dios en la de todos.	<i>Every man for himself and God for us all.</i>
37. Cada uno sabe dónde le aprieta el zapato.	<i>Only the wearer knows where his shoe pinches.</i>
38. Cobra buena fama y échate a dormir.	<i>Win a good reputation and sleep at your ease.</i>
39. Con el roce, nace el cariño.	<i>Loving comes by looking.</i>

Spanish Proverb	English Proverb
40. Contigo, pan y cebolla.	<i>Better a dinner of herbs than a stalled ox where hate is.</i>

Table 4. Examples of the most common Spanish Proverbs and their Translation into English.

### 3. Concluding Remarks

This paper has attempted to point the way beyond traditional bilingual dictionaries on to new horizons. Two crucial points have been made in the first part related to idioms: first, the patterned nature of English and Spanish idioms, both lexically and grammatically. These patterns allow for certain flexibility on certain idioms and they do not always coincide in English and Spanish; Second, examples from corpora point out that these idioms are pervasive in oral and written communication and must be analyzed from a pragmatic and cognitive standpoint in order to avoid misunderstandings when rendering them into another language. Both idioms and proverbs provide fascinating cultural insights onto the target language. Functional, data-driven and cognitive approaches are necessary to improve the knowledge and acquisition of these multiword units. Phraseology is undoubtedly a key factor in improving fluency and accuracy in language production and translation.

The translation of idioms and proverbs from Spanish into English and vice versa is a pending task in bilingual lexicography and paremiology. Internet offers usage examples in context, but not all the sources are reliable. English and Spanish corpora include scarce proverbs and bilingual dictionaries only reflect the most significant ones, without differentiating them from idioms. The *Instituto Cervantes Proverb Database* will provide a practical solution for the translation of paremiological minimum and other frequent proverbs with expressive and discursive functions in oral and written texts.

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