Cultural Diversity in Crossing the Boundaries Between Human and Animal in Language – Germanic and Slavic Similes and Metaphors

Jaromira Rakusan

School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

A B S T R A C T

The paper is concerned with the occurrence and the functions of nouns referring to animals in the context of similes and metaphors implementing the metaphoric scheme »Human is an Animal«. These phraseological units are the result of repressing the boundary percepts lying between a Human and a Non-Human. The data (5500 entries) is excerpted from English, German, Czech, and Russian phraseological lexicons and texts. The paper deals with the following: classification of animals appearing in the data; the classes are defined as the cross-section between zones of social distance, e.g. relatives, servants, strangers, etc., and zones of physical distance, e.g. house, farm, remote, etc.; establishing indices of popularity of animals; discussion of Sus srofa (the pig) in terms of its symbolic values in Germanic and Slavic cultures. The functional analysis of animal nouns and their referents is supported by quantitative statements.

Key words: *human, animal, metaphor, simile, social distance zone, physical distance zone*

Introduction

Over the last few decades metaphors have been studied for their potential as a source of knowledge. This paper is a small contribution following this trend. It concentrates on the human vs. non-human controversy in a cross-cultural perspective. The linguistic corpus used for the study comes from the reservoir of Slavic and Germanic phraseology and consists of similes and metaphors implementing a common metaphoric frame HUMAN IS AN ANIMAL.

The paper presents the research along the following points:

1) a general outline of Czech, Russian, English, and German metaphoric faunae,

2) the degree of suitability of animal constructs as human models,

3) symbolism of one of the most popular animals of the corpora – *the pig* – as encoded in Czech and English phraseology.

Linguistic Data

The data implementing the metaphoric frame 'Human is an Animal' consists of four corpora of relatively fixed collocations, mostly similes and, to a lesser extent, metaphors, collected from phraseological lexicons of Czech (1006 units)[1,2], Russian (900 units)[1,2,3–12], English (2018 units)[1,2,13–14], and German (1641 units)[1,2,15–20].

A simile can be defined as an asymmetric binary construction divided into two parts by a comparator. The comparator is a stable sign of similes and it is represented mostly by conjunctions, such as *like* or *as*. Following the Aristotelian tradition, I will refer to the main logical components as 'comparandum', 'comparatum' and 'tertium comparationis'.

In our corpus, the comparandum, appearing on the left side with respect to the comparator, always refers to a particular person. The comparatum, on the right, refers to an animal. The tertium comparationis expresses the similarity of the comparandum and comparatum defined by the speaker. Thus in 'the corpulent lady lounged around like a pig in clover', 'the corpulent lady' is the comparandum, 'lounged around' is the tertium comparationis, 'like' is the comparator, and 'a pig in clover' is the comparatum. Tertium comparationis can be also expressed by a noun, for instance in 'to have the bubbly-cock's nose', or by an adjectival form 'be as independent as a hog on ice', etc.

Linguistic Fauna of Similes and Metaphors

The excerpted utterances contain a great number of different nouns referring to various genera and species of animals. We need a classification that would help to clarify their symbolic meaning and would serve as a relevant taxonomy for all four corpora. Traditional folk taxonomy, the one which makes sense in the realm of symbolic meanings, classifies animals primarily according to their *Locus* or *Physical Space Position,* expressed by the features LAND, AIR, and WATER. This principle supports the observation that in folkloric imagery the fauna is assigned distinct features reflecting the perception of the actual animals in nature[21]. Further, combining the features LAND with WATER and LAND with AIR, we are able to set off further groups, roughly corresponding to the zoological classes of Amphibians and Insects.

The second principal parameter is *Social Space Position.* Such categorization reflects the social discrimination we practice almost daily in our adult lives – sorting people into those that are 'like us', and the others that we consider 'not like us'. Among the people, that are like us we set off the members of the immediate family, distant relatives, etc. These distinctions may be treated as analogies in the world of non-humans. We categorize some as 'pets', virtually family members who live inside 'the house' and the others 'farm animals' who live outside the house on 'the farm', etc.[22]

Besides the two basic underlying principles, several other classificatory features have been applied to the data. The category 'Wild Animals' is split into 'Wild Large Animals' and 'Wild Small Animals'. The animals assigned to the groups belong here not only due to their relative size within the polarity LARGE/SMALL (e.g. elephant vs. mouse) but also due to

their significance according to the features PREDATORY/HARMLESS (e.g. wolf vs. deer). Membership in the category of 'Wild Large Animals' is also assigned to the highly significant group of primates, irrespective of their size and habits.

The category labeled 'Generic' stands outside the above described classification. It contains nouns referring to animals as a class, such as in English 'beast' or 'animal', and their equivalents in other languages.

Figure 1 captures the relational sets of animals classified according to the above-explained principles. On the abscissa, the proportions of the groups of animals are stated in terms of the percentage of their occurrence in the phraseological units for each language corpus. On the ordinate, the animal groups are arranged on the scale of proximity to humans in terms of physical as well as social space.
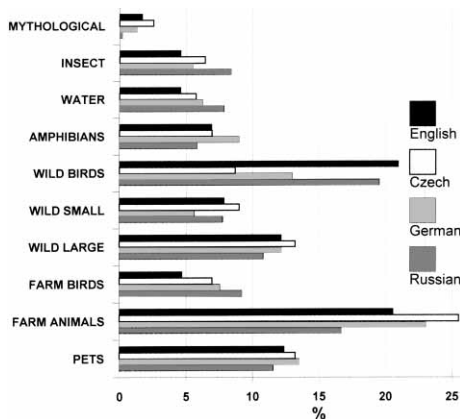

Fig. 1. Linguistic fauna of similes and metaphors

The occurrence of different groups of animals show a common tendency to decrease in number with the increase in physical and social distance from humans. For instance, in all corpora we will find more Farm Animals than Water Animals or Birds, etc.

The speakers' livelihood is an obvious reason for further proportional differences in the choice of animals. The long agricultural tradition of the Czechs and the Germans explains their preference for farm animals. The members of the English and the Russian speaking communities, traditionally hunters and seafarers, take more interest in the genera and species inhabiting their own specific environment, such as wild birds.

In all corpora, there are more Farm Animals than Pets. The preoccupation with livestock in general and the pig in particular, can most likely be interpreted as emphatically anthropocentric, i.e. an interest in animals is intended to serve some human purpose.

Comparing the proportions stated in Figure 1, we notice that the most pronounced quantitative differences are found between the Czech and the English data. We will therefore have a closer look at these two corpora.

The Functions of Animal Images

Our bodies often remind us of animal bodies on various grounds, such as shape, size, texture, color, motion, vocality, strength, etc. The similes and metaphors expressing physical aspects of human and animal similarity are probably the oldest and the most obvious figures of speech. They are also the most elaborated and the most varied ones.

Levi Strauss claimed that animals figure so commonly in discourse not only because primitive men were familiar with their bodies and because 'they are good to eat', but because 'they are good to think with'[23,24]. We may then argue that the purpose of the animal metaphor is not only classification and the creation of order, but also 'forging a system of moral

conduct and resolving the problem of man in nature'[25]. The expression of resemblance in mental and social aspects, however, is less numerous and is limited to only several domains. Table 1 illustrates the above mentioned points with examples from Czech and English.

Popularity Index

If we know the occurrence of an animal name (on the ordinate) and the number of domains in which it functions (on the abscissa), we can establish the popularity of the animal name's referent. In Figure 2, each animal is assigned its own popularity index expressed as the point of intersection between these two parameters.

Figure 2 contains only those animal names that appeared in more than ten metaphoric utterances. The underlying principles for reading the graphs in Figure 2 are the following:

a) The higher the number of domains in which the animal participates, the higher the degree of the animal's perceived similarity to humans.

b) The higher the occurrence of a particular animal noun, the higher the degree of familiarity with the animal and, therefore, the higher the suitability of the animal for its participation in the world of metaphors.

Animals with high values for both parameters (in Czech: the 'Pig', the 'Dog', and the 'Cow'; in English: the 'Dog', the 'Cat', and the 'Pig') are clustered towards the upper right corner of the graph. Understandably they belong to those animals who share in their masters' lives the most – the farm animals and the pets. The clusters positioned towards the left lower portion of the graph and in between the two extremes often turn out to be just as interesting. Their low popularity status is caused by various circumstances. It may be that a particular animal was part

TABLE 1
PHYSICAL, MENTAL, AND SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

| Domains	Examples
Physical Aspects	
Body Parts	Cz: mít labutí šíji (neck; swan); E: have cat's eyes
Size	Cz: být hubený jako koza (skinny; she-goat); E: be fat as a porker
Strength	Cz: být silný jako medvěd (strong; bear); E: be strong as a bull
Hygiene, etc.	Cz: být špinavý jako prase (dirty; pig); E: be howerly as a dog
Mental Aspects	
Character	Cz: být lstivý jako had (sly; snake); E: be as timid as a doe
Emotion	Cz: být smutný jako želva (sad; turtle); E: be happy as a pig in mulch
Intellect, etc.	Cz: být pitomý jako ovce (stupid; sheep); E: be silly as a goose
Social Aspects	
Status/ Profession	Cz: být bohatá jako koza rohatá (rich; she-goat, iron.); E: be a cock of the school
Aggression	Cz: vrhnout se na někoho jako saò (descent on smb. like a dragon); E. descent on somebody like a wolf
Contact, etc.	Cz: scházet se jako švábi na pivo (gather; cockroaches for beer); E: be friendly as a puppy
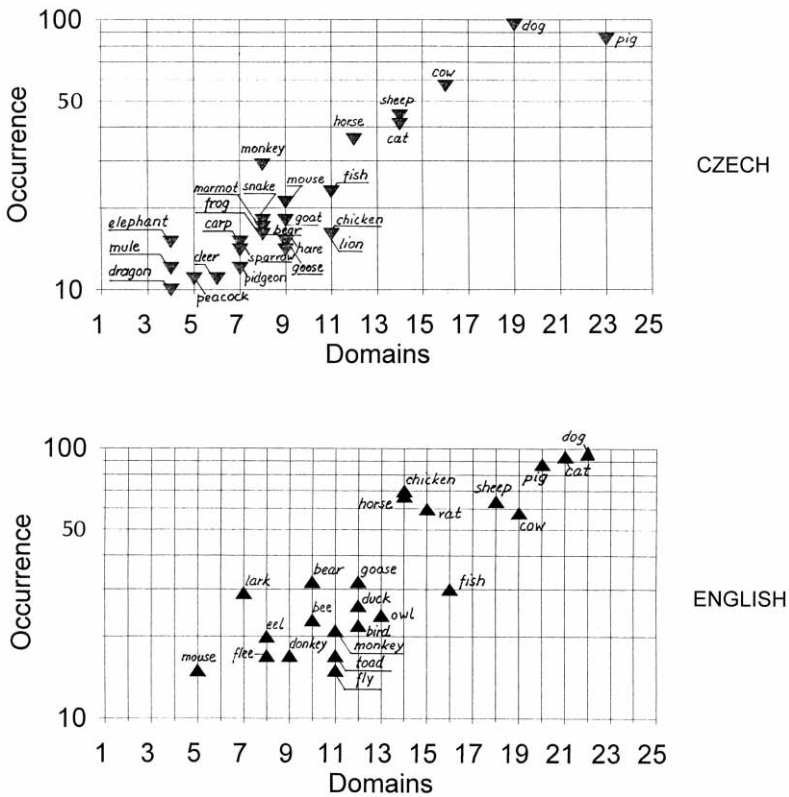
Fig. 2. Popularity index

of a taboo (e.g. Slavic bear), or it did not appear during the early habitation of speakers (exotic animals), or knowledge of it was mediated solely via written sources (mythological animals), etc.

TABLE 2
LEXICON RELATED TO 'THE PIG'

	ENGLISH	CZECH
Generic term	pig; swine	prase; prasátko (dimin.) čuně; čuník (dimin.)
Female	sow; swine; gissy	svině
Male for breeding	boar	kanec
Male for fattening	hog; porker; rig	vepŷ; vepřík (dimin.) bagoun (Hungarian hog)
Young	piglet; greck	sele; selátko (dimin.) čuně; čuník (dimin.)

TABLE 3
FEATURES OF PHYSICAL SIMILARITY BETWEEN PIGS AND PEOPLE

DOMAINS	ENGLISH	BOTH	CZECH
Appearance:	bleeding lousy short	fat dirty sweaty	heavy untidy scalded smelly ridiculous repulsive shit-covered
Body parts:	head jaw tail legs shit		face eyes cheeks snout hands penis
Consummation:	munch slobber	feed/eat drunk	devour glut booze, etc. (8 vulgar expressions for alcohol consumption)
Vocality:	squeal	snore	grunt snuffle smack
Motion/Position:	sit sprawl run	move clumsily lie wallow around root	move slowly roll
General state:	sick	sleepy comfortable hardy	strong
Color:	sandy		red pink red-haired
Sex:			romp

Visiting in a Metaphorical Pigsty

Sus scrofa (the pig) as a species is in the corpora referred to by lexical items listed in Table 2.

In both corpora, the number of expressions referring to the pig is about the same. In Czech, however, we notice the presence of diminutive derivatives from the majority of the bases. The diminutives in general tend to carry connotation of intimacy and positive emotive evaluation of the referent. This fact contrasts with the extremely negative evaluation of the animal itself and the people compared to it in the metaphoric expressions under consideration.

We will now turn our attention to the symbolism of the pig expressed by tertia comparationis and the animal attributes in comparatum. Table 3 lists the features expressing physical similarity between people and pigs. Table 4 lists the features expressing mental and social similarity[*].

Columns BOTH in Tables 3 and 4 contain the features shared by both languages. Mostly based on objective observation of the animal, they seem obvious and predictable. Columns of specifically Czech and specifically English features of the pig, reveal consistent differences. Compared to English, the Czech data display a wider variety of features, most of them rather expressive and vulgar. The concept of physical resemblance (Table 3) is most vividly implemented by specific physiological components (see *Body Parts* domain). In Czech, these components build the entire human face, including the eyes. In many cultures, eyes, besides their primary perceptual meaning, symbolize the principle difference between Human and Animal – *Emotion and Intellect*[26]. To say that somebody has 'pig's eyes' is an insult bordering on condemnation. The rest of the face, the hands, and especially the sexual organ are all symbolically sensitive parts of the human body. To think that they might remind somebody of the pig's parts is a vicious and denigrating insult. In the *Vocality* domain, English picks up high pitch of the pig's anguished squealing, whereas in the Czech data the pigs grunt. We find the parallels in the sets of onomatopoeic expressions imitating animal sounds – in English /on^y k on^y k/ and in Czech /xro xro/. The *Consummation* domain reflects again the inexorable Czech approach. Whereas in English the unfortunate animal violates only table manners, e.g. *munch, slobber*, in Czech the person eating like a pig commits a sin

TABLE 4
FEATURES OF MENTAL AND SOCIAL SIMILARITY BETWEEN PIGS AND PEOPLE

DOMAINS	ENGLISH	BOTH	CZECH
Character:	base sour	lazy	indulgent malicious vile wild
Intellect:	stupid ignorant clever		
Emotion:	pleased mad frustrated	contented	cold
Status:	poor rich contemptible		a set of insults referring to the members of social/ethnic groups, e.g. capitalist/Bolshevik swine, etc.
Contact:	follow somebody attentive		attention seeking
Aggressiveness:	dangerous	fierce	domineering
Social object:	make a pig of somebody		drag somebody like a pig master somebody kill somebody scald somebody

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* The examples of similes and metaphors illustrating the features in Tables 3 and 4 are found in the Appendix.

– gluttony, e.g. *devour, glut, get drunk*, etc. Further, we notice that English does not implement the same range of domains, e.g. the *Color* domain is represented by one expression only, i.e. *sandy*, and the *Sex* domain is not implemented at all.

While the English expression of physical similarities between the pig and the human is suppressed, in the sphere of *mental and social functions*, the number of attributes and their semantic variety is higher than that of the Czech corpus. It is interesting to note that while in the English data *Intellect* and *Emotion* domains are represented by six semantic features, in the Czech data these potential characteristics of the pig are not considered. The only feature appearing is 'cold', which means 'devoid of emotions'. The overall characteristics of a person who is compared to the pig in English, is unsympathetic, sloppy, and rather weak. In Czech, however, the appearance and character of the pig-person are of the worst possible kind. Such a person, usually a male, is obese, dirty, repulsive, and a glutton. His character happens to match his exterior. Significant is the mention of the animal's lack of restraint as well as its lack of other exclusively human properties – emotion and intellect. In view of the extremely negative connotation attached to the pig's image, it is not surprising that, the porcine related lexicon is used to slander all kinds of adversaries, namely the members of disliked ethnic and social groups. Nevertheless, in both languages the most abominable human qualities are usually not associated with the generic expression for the species or with the names assigned to the male pigs (see Table 1). It is always the female – Cz. *svin*; E. *the swine* – which carries the worst connotation of meanness and treachery.

One might wonder why of all domesticated animals, the pigs carry such an unfair load of abuse. Anthropologist Leach suspects that we feel a rather special guilt about our pigs. After all, sheep provide wool, cows provide milk, chickens provide eggs, but we rear pigs for the sole purpose of killing and eating them, and this is rather a shameful thing, a shame which quickly attaches to the pig itself[27].

Conclusions

The Slavic and German corpora share an extensive usage of metaphoric expressions with animals in comparata. The expressions are ancient as well as plentiful, and they count not only as a substantial part of the codified phraseological treasure but also as frequently occurring components of everyday language. Some of the animals are presented as models of beauty and high moral standards, others are depicted as the humans' bestial antipode, model of chaos, and deterrents. The pig has been assigned the latter role in both languages, even though not in the same degree of extension and intensity.

As a matter of fact, the visit in the Czech and English metaphoric pigsty results in several observations that can be extended over the entire set of animals. It has been noticed that in Czech similes the majority of animals are used mainly as models of the physical aspects of humanhood[28]. In English, on the other hand, the animals tend to illustrate character, emotions, and intellectual properties of people to a significantly greater extent than in the Czech set. It seems that the English model systematically claims the overall commonality of animals and people, thus indicating a greater degree of inner identification with them, and consequently, more leniency and much closer attachment to them than the Czech model. Such differences in the perception of animal/human boundaries may be caused by and reflected in various extralinguistic aspects of the respective popular cultures. These factors may include economic imperatives, as well as religious views

and accepted attitudes, reflecting current and past practices. These problems, however, are well beyond the scope of this paper, but have to be taken into consideration in future research.

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J. Rakusan

School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies, Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario, K1S5B6, Canada
E-mail: jrakusan@ccs.carleton.ca

KULTURNA RAZNOLIKOST U JEZIČNOM RAZGRANIČAVANJU LJUDSKOG I ŽIVOTINJSKOG – GERMANSKE I SLAVENSKE POREDBE I METAFORE

S A Ž E T A K

U članku se govori o pojavi i ulozi imenica kojima se označuju životinje u kontekstu poredbi i metafora koje sadržavaju temeljnu konceptualnu metaforu »Čovjek je životinja«. Ovakve su frazeološke jedinice rezultat suzbijanja granica između »ljudskog« i »ne-ljudskog«. Podaci (5500 natuknica) su uzeti iz engleskih, njemačkih, čeških i ruskih frazeoloških rječnika i tekstova. U članku je obrađena klasifikacija životinja koje se pojavljuju u podacima, s time da se vrste definiraju kao sjecište zona socijalne distance (npr. rođaci, sluge, stranci, itd.) i fizičke distance (npr. kuća, gospodarstvo, daljina, itd.) te definiranje indeksa popularnosti životinja te koncepta »svinje« (Sus srofa) s obzirom na njegovu simboličku vrijednost u germanskim i slavenskim kulturama. Funkcionalna analiza imenica kojima se označavaju životinje i njihovih referenata potvrđena je kvantitativnom obradom podataka.

Appendix

The English Pig: Illustrative Examples

Appearance: bleed like a stuck pig; lousy as a hog; high as a hog; all but the bristles

Body Parts: be pig-headed; be pig-chafted; be like a pig's tail; mean as a pig's shit and twice as nasty; bow-legged as a Potter's pig

Consummation: munch and slobber at his meat like a swine routing apples in a pail

Vocality: squealing like a stuck pig

Motion/Position: sit there and hang your gruntle like a sow playing on a trump (a harp); sprawls like a swine at the piglet

Physical State: sick as a gissy / hog / pig

Color: sandy as a Tamworth pig (a red-haired lusty woman)

Character: come again as a Goodyer 's pig (never); fess (conceited) as a Cox 's pig; greedy as a porker; be a still sow; think a lie like a Cox 's pig

Intellect: subtle as a dead pig; clever like the old Simpson 's sow

Emotion: mad as a pulled swine; be hog-tied; sour as a rig

Status: poor and pert like a parson 's pig; be pigs in clover; be like a pig; no good to anyone till he 's cut up; be a long pig (cannibal food)

Contact: follow somebody about like an Anthony pig; prick up one 's ears like an old sow in beans

Social Object: make a pig of somebody

The Czech Pig: Illustrative Examples with English Glosses

Appearance: těžký jako prase (heavy; pig); vypasený jako vepř (portly; hog); neupravený jako čuně (untidy; piglet); zvládnout ty nechutný kance (manage those repulsive boars); opařené prase (scalded pig); páchnoucí vepř (smelly hog); zasraný jako prase (shit-covered; pig)

Body Parts: mít prasečí ksicht (pig 's face); mít prasečí očka (pig 's eyes, dim.); mít tvářičky jako prasátko (little cheeks; piglet); mít prasečí rypák (pig 's snout); mít prasečí ručičky (pig 's hands dim.); mít to jako prasečí mrcásek (have it (penis); pig 's tail, dim.)

Consummation: žrát jako prase (devour; pig); namazat se/vožrat se jako svině (booze; swine); ty prochlastaný kanče! (you drunken boar!)

Vocality: chrochtat jako vepřík (grunt; porker dim.); funet jako když jede prase z bukvic (snuffle; pig leaving beech acorns); mlaskat jako sele u bachyne (smack; piglet lying by sow); být zticha jako prase v žitě (be quiet; pig in rye)

Motion/Position: být pomalý jako prase (slow; pig); zválet postel jako kanec (trample bed; boar)

Physical State: mít sílu jako kanec (strenght; boar)

Color: být červený jako opařené prase (red; scalded pig); mít tvářičky růžově jako selátko (have cheeks, dim., pink; piglet); vyzrzlý prasata (red-headed pigs)

Sex: přirážet jako nejdivočejší kanec (romp; the wildest boar)

Character: pochrochtávat jako spokojený vepřík (keep grunting; satisfied porker dim.); chovat se jako svině/behave; swine); ty svině zatracená! (you bloody swine!); nechutní kanci (repulsive boars); řádit jako postřelený kanec; (rage; wounded boar); čuni jedno čuňácký! (porker you pork-like!)

Emotion: ty studená svině! (you cold swine!)

Status: dvounohá čuňata (two-legged porkers); nebohý čuník (pityful porker, dim.); malí čuníci (little piggies); a set of social/ethnic insults, e.g. ty bolševické svině (these bolshevik swines); namyšlený enteligentský svině (snobish intelectual swines); svině v Moskve (swines in Moscow)

Contact: potřebovat něco jako prase drbání (need something as a pig needs scratching)

Aggressiveness: panovat jako kanec (rule; boar)

Social Object: přitáhnout ty nejhnusnější kance (drag here the most repulsive boars); zvládnout ty kance (dominate; boars); zabít ty svině (kill these swines)