

A Corpus-Based Contrastive Analysis of the Lexeme 'cat' in English and Croatian

Naseredin, Lara

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Lara Naseredin

**A Corpus-Based Contrastive Analysis of the Lexeme ‘cat’
in English and Croatian**

Master’s Thesis

Thesis advisor: Janja Čulig Suknaić, PhD

Zagreb, 2024

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at analysing multi-word expressions containing the lexeme *cat/mačka* and exploring its metaphorical potential in two languages – English and Croatian – using the corpus-based method. The paper consists of a theoretical and a practical part, and its contents are organised into six major sections. After a brief introduction, an overview of some key concepts crucial for understanding the conducted analysis is given, which includes the explanation of lexemes, compounds, and phraseological units. This section is followed by methodology which explains how the collected expressions were obtained from the corpus and grouped. The practical part of the paper is the analysis where a variety of multi-word expressions were analysed in detail, focusing especially on how the lexeme *cat/mačka* behaves within those expressions and how it contributes to the overall metaphorical meaning. The following section includes the conclusions that were drawn after conducting the analysis and a comparison of the use of the lexeme in the English and Croatian language. At the end of the paper, a general conclusion is given.

Key words: multi-word expressions, cat, mačka, corpus, metaphorical potential

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language can be regarded as a living organism. It is a product of human activity and is constantly changing. Languages change in synchronicity with the culture, history, and society they belong to. It is relatively simple to come to the conclusion that languages always have to be open to changes because of their variable nature, and the semantics of natural languages is fluid, meaning that certain new meanings have a habit of emerging while at the same time, their older counterparts have a tendency to disappear.

Lexemes are a fundamental part of any language. They carry their own meaning, but when combined with other lexemes to create multi-word units such as compounds or phraseological units, their meaning can change and they can contribute to the metaphorical meaning of the entire expression. Observing the role of certain lexemes in different phrases, in the creation of literal and figurative language, one can gain valuable insight into how their use within those expressions inspired those who initially created them and how speakers who use them on a daily basis perceive their meaning.

The aim of this thesis is to explore in what kind of expressions the lexeme *cat/mačka* appears in the English and Croatian language using the corpus-based approach, mainly focusing on the figurative domain and including the comparison of the lexeme use in both languages. It is expected that the analysis will reveal a significant amount of metaphorical meaning attached to the lexeme *cat/mačka*, especially in phraseological units.

2. KEY CONCEPTS

In order to comprehend the conducted analysis, it is essential to look into some of the main concepts and notions in linguistics.

2.1. Lexemes

First and foremost, it is necessary to explain an important concept in the linguistic branches of lexicology and morphology – lexemes. A lexeme, sometimes referred to as “vocabulary item” or “dictionary word”, is a meaningful unit consisting of a single word or multiple words and an abstract linguistic entity existing in a person’s lexicon (Katamba 2005: 12). Andreou (2019: 1) defines it as a “theoretical construct that stands for the unitary meaning and shared syntactic properties of a group of word forms”. An alternative explanation is provided by Ježek (2016: 22–23), who defines a lexeme as a lexical unit of any language and the core form to which inflected forms are attributed. Thus, vocabulary items can be viewed as a set of words that

belong to the same word class, have the same stem, and are associated with a single meaning, but differ in grammatic variation. To illustrate this notion, the verb *walk* will be taken as an example. Its meaning is to move at a regular pace from one place to another, and *walks*, *walked*, and *walking* are all instances or word-forms of that same lexeme because they share the same meaning and belong to the same word class, even though they vary in form.

A lexeme can take different endings depending on the word class it belongs to as each one has its own set of inflectional endings that convey certain grammatical information. Given that this study deals with the nominal lexeme *cat/mačka*, the focus will be on that part of speech. Suffixes attached to nouns give us grammatical information such as the number, case, or gender of the word. An important distinction to make here is between the inflectional systems of English and Croatian. In the English language, words do not change form to indicate grammatical gender nor case, only number. The Croatian language, on the other hand, has a much bigger number of inflectional suffixes that reflect not only the number, but also the gender and especially the grammatical case of a noun. This is important to mention because there is a significant difference in the form in the English and the Croatian corpus. Nonetheless, the meaning of the lexeme itself stays unaffected.

2.2. Compounds

One can think of lexemes as the building blocks of a language that can be combined together to create new linguistic units and new meanings. This brings us to compounding, a type of word-formation process that combines two or more separate bases to create a single unit with a new, distinct meaning (Bauer 2003: 326).

In the English language, compounds have several interesting properties, including compositionality and orthographic invariability, which will be briefly discussed in the following paragraphs. Compositionality refers to the extent to which the compound's overall meaning can be inferred from the meanings of its constituent elements (Plag et al. 2009: 233). Compounds can be compositional, meaning that one can easily understand what the new unit conveys based on the meaning of each constituent. Take for instance the compound *catnap*. It is fairly easy to infer that it means a type of sleep similar to the one cats take. On the other hand, there are compounds whose meaning is not the sum of their constituents, like *deadline*, defined as a particular time or date by which something should be completed. In such cases, the link between the whole and the individual parts is not compositional, i.e. is metaphorical (Aronoff and Fudeman 2011: 110–111).

Moving on to the second property, a central issue regarding compounds is their orthographic representation. In English we distinguish between three types of compounds – open, closed, and hyphenated (Plag et al. 2009: 100). Open compounds are those that have a blank space between the constituent elements, for example *high school*. They can be difficult to recognise as a single linguistic unit, which is why context is crucial when it comes to identifying them. When the two elements are not separated by a space and are written as a single orthographic word, like *girlfriend* or *breakfast*, we are talking about closed or solid forms. The third type are those that include a hyphen between the individual elements (e.g. *sister-in-law*), hence the name. According to Plag et al. (2009: 100), the rules regarding spelling compounds are flexible and some can even be represented in all three ways, without any change in the meaning (e.g. *flower pot*, *flower-pot*, *flowerpot*). One thing that seems to determine the spelling is the frequency of use. Compounds that are frequently used tend to have no space or are hyphenated, while infrequently used compounds are most likely to be written with a blank space between the elements (Plag et al. 2009: 100).

2.3. Phraseological units

As previously mentioned, lexical items are not always a single word; they can be a group of words that function as a single unit and have non-literal meanings. This section will deal with phraseological units (PUs) or phrasemes, linguistic constructions that are present in many languages, make communication more interesting and colourful, and that reflect the culture of the language they belong to.

Phraseology, despite its relatively early emergence in the early 20th century, has mostly remained on the very periphery of linguistic studies. That is, until a certain number of researchers in Eastern and Western Europe, as well as the United States of America finally became interested in researching all the different ways in which phraseology influences basic linguistic fields, such as lexicology, semantics or language learning. Nowadays, the field has considerable influence.

For a long time, there has been a debate among scholars regarding what phraseological units actually are and how to define them. Kunin (1970: 210) suggests that they are fixed expressions, i.e. sequences of words that create a specific meaning, either completely or partially figurative. Omazić (2015: 20) gives a more extensive and precise definition, describing them as “conventionalized multiword combinations that are holistically stored and automatically

reproduced, and that may vary in frequency of occurrence, fixedness of form, and compositeness of meaning.”

This term is often used synonymously with “idiom”; however, idioms are believed to be a specific type of phraseological units. Fiedler (2007: 15) believes these also include binomials (*fair and square*), stereotyped comparisons or similes (*as proud as a peacock*), proverbs (*Birds of feather flock together*), winged words (*forbidden fruit*), catchphrases (*Show me the money*), collocations (*excruciating pain*) and routine formulae (*you're welcome*). Thus, it is an umbrella term that includes a variety of multi-word expressions and they constitute the phrasicon of a language (Fiedler 2007: 15). Based on the findings in the corpora, idioms, proverbs, and similes will be shortly explained in the next paragraph.

Recognized as the “prototype of the phraseological unit” by Gläser (1984: 124), an idiom is generally defined as an expression whose meaning is figurative and cannot be predicted by analysing each individual word. A good example of an idiom is the expression *dead cat bounce* which has nothing to do with the literal act of a dead cat bouncing off the floor. However, the figurative meaning of the expression is likely motivated by this image and what it actually denotes is a temporary and deceiving recovery in the price of an asset, which is nearly impossible to infer from the combination of the words. Another commonly used phraseological unit whose meaning cannot be derived from its parts is called a proverb and it is defined as a “well-known sentence which expresses a general truth, shared experience, a piece of advice, or a moral principle in an easy to memorize form and is handed down from generation from generation” (Fiedler 2007: 44). Some examples are the English proverb *there's more than one way to skin a cat* and the Croatian *kad mačke nema, miševi kolo vode*. Lastly, a simile is a multi-word expression that compares one thing to another, for example a person to an animal, which is the case of the expressions *vući se kao krepana mačka* and *to be like a cat on a hot tin roof*. All of these examples were found in the English and Croatian corpus and further explained along with other idioms in the upcoming analysis.

2.3.1. Features of phraseological units

In order for a linguistic construction to be classified as a phraseological item, it has to meet certain criteria. According to Fiedler (2007: 17), there are five features of phraseological units: polylexemic structure, stability, lexicalization, idiomaticity, and connotation. Each one will now be explained.

Polylexemic structure means that at least two independent words are required to make a phraseological unit (Fiedler 2007: 17). However, Fiedler herself raises the question of whether the number of words or “size” is a good criterion for classifying a linguistic unit as a phraseological one. For example, compounds, although they consist of two or more independent words, can be idiomatic and changed into a phraseological word group, are not recognized as phraseological units (Fiedler 2007: 18).

Phrasemes are characterised by both semantic and syntactic stability, making them different from free phrases or random combinations of words. Semantic stability refers to the ability of a phraseme to maintain its meaning, even if the constituent words acquire new senses over time. On the other hand, syntactic stability means that the units have immutability of form, i.e. a fixed structure that does not allow for changes in the number, tense, voice, or word order of the constituents (Fiedler 2007: 19). Both Fiedler (2007: 20) and Gläser (1998: 129) believe stability is relative as some phraseological items can exhibit some degree of semantic and syntactic flexibility. Although they are generally associated with a single meaning, sometimes they can convey more than one meaning. Also, some expressions allow for changes in structure, like substitution of constituents (*to sit/be on a fence*) or insertion of new words (e.g. *(as) brown as a berry*).

An important feature that is related to stability is lexicalization. When an expression first emerges in a language, it is not recognized by many of its speakers. As it is used more and more, it becomes widely known, accepted and stored as a whole or a single lexical unit in the memory and lexicon of a community (Fiedler 2007: 21).

A feature that is considered optional by some scholars is idiomaticity. It refers to the fact that the meaning of a phraseological item cannot be derived from the meanings of its constituents (Fiedler 2017: 22). For instance, one might know what the words *piece* and *cake* mean, but not infer that the expression *piece of cake* means “something that is very easy to do”. Omazić (2015: 21) argues that phraseological items are gradable and that they can range from fully opaque expressions or pure idioms (e.g. *kick the bucket*) to transparent expressions (e.g. *make a decision*). This property is related to metaphorical meaning as the words that make up a unit tend to lose their lexical meaning.

The last characteristic is connotation and Fielder (2007: 23) claims that “phraseological units are often used to put emphasis on the speaker’s/writer’s intention and to make a text more expressive”. For instance, instead of simply saying that someone or something is the best of the best, this idea can be expressed by the idiom *be the cat’s whiskers*, and the use of this metaphorical expression does not only make the conversation/text more interesting, but also

creates a stronger image in the listener's/reader's head and the message is more likely to resonate with the audience.

2.3.2. Traditional vs. cognitive approach to idioms

Idioms have been studied and explained through two major theoretical frameworks and we distinguish between the traditional or classical and the cognitive approach. The traditional view is based on the idea that idioms are divorced from the human conceptual system, linguistic in nature, and have arbitrary meaning, that is, there is no logical link between the meaning of the idiom and the literal meaning of the constituent words (Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen 2005: 8). They are considered "dead metaphors" as they were once innovative but are now conventionalized, and their meanings must be learned by heart (Kövecses and Szabó 1996: 329).

On the other hand, the cognitive approach within Cognitive Linguistics (CL) goes against the view that idioms are arbitrary and postulates that they can in fact be partially compositional, with the figurative meanings of the constituent words contributing to the metaphorical meaning of the entire expression (Gibbs 2017: 40). This approach views these expressions as metaphorically motivated and related to the human cognition, i.e. connected to already-existing conceptual patterns in our minds (Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen 2005: 8). Given that their meaning is based on the general knowledge that humans have of the world, they are conceptual, and not linguistic in nature.

2.3.3. Conceptual metaphors

According to Omazić (2015: 56), many idioms are either based on a conceptual metaphor or are metaphors themselves and both of these mechanisms contribute to the development of non-literal language or figurative meanings of idioms (2015: 30). In order to understand the cognitive view on idioms, we have to define these two mechanisms.

Metaphors are present in every language, especially in written texts and poetry. A traditional definition of a metaphor is that it is a figure of speech that includes a comparison between two unlike entities, without using the words "like" or "as". However, the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), established within the Cognitive Linguistics framework and proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their book "Metaphors We Live By", regards metaphors as more than just a linguistic and ornamental device. From the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics, a metaphor is a matter of the mind and thought, not of words and language.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 3), the human conceptual system is metaphorical in character and this mechanism plays an important role in how we think and understand the world. It allows us to comprehend one thing in terms of another, more specifically to understand abstract concepts through concrete or tangible ones (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 59).

A conceptual metaphor is seen as “a systematic set of correspondences between two domains of experience” (Kövecses 2010: 14). Thus, are talking about conceptual mappings between domains. The first domain from which metaphorical expressions are drawn is concrete and called the source domain, while the domain that is trying to be understood is the target one and it is abstract. For example, in the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY, journey would be considered the concrete, hence the source domain, and given that the concept of life is more abstract, that is the target domain. This notion can also be explained on the example of the idiom *let the cat out of the bag*, where an object with physical qualities, i.e. the animal cat is used to convey the abstract concept of secrecy.

3. METHODOLOGY

The main part of this thesis, the analysis, was conducted using the *Sketch Engine* web-software platform. For the purpose of this thesis, the chosen languages were English and Croatian. For the English language, the enTenTen21 corpus was used, which contains over 52 billion English words, while for the Croatian language, the hrWaC corpus with more than 1,2 billion words was used for the analysis.

The first step was searching for the lexeme *cat/mačka* in the corpora using the *Concordance* tool to determine expressions in which it is used figuratively and the first 600 occurrences in each corpus were reviewed. In the English corpus, instances were found where *cat* is an abbreviation for *category* (six sentences)¹ and an acronym for a type of system (30 sentences)², and in the Croatian corpus it was used in five sentences denoting a component of a crane³. Such examples were omitted from the analysis, while those carrying metaphorical meaning were extracted and analysed.

¹ example sentence: As I understand it, there's just no way to get LCA network infrastructure into anywhere more useful in Shalom, and after talking to them, they (for understandable reasons) won't let us run a **cat** 5 cable down to the first floor common room or somewhere equally useful.

² example sentence: We developed a web content adaptation and transcoding system, titled as **CATS** (Content Adaptation and Transcoding System), which is extensible and highly configurable, based on internet technologies like CC/PP, UAProf, RDF, XML, XSL etc [1].

³ example sentence: Dizalice su sastavljene od **mačke**, jednog / dva glavna nosača, dva / četiri čeonu nosača, elektropreme i radio upravljanja.

Before the semantic analysis, the expressions were searched in various general and phraseological dictionaries in both languages, after which they were divided into two groups – phraseological and non-phraseological units. Once the division was made, sentences in which *cat/mačka* is used figuratively but is not part of a phraseological unit and which were obtained by the simple lexeme search were taken directly from the corpus and described. In the case of phraseological units, they were searched separately and the first 100 occurrences were reviewed.

In the English corpus, it has been established that *cat* appears in 13 phraseological units (*let the cat out of the bag; be a fat cat; bell the cat; put the cat among the pigeons; smile like a Cheshire cat; like herding cats; raining cats and dogs; be the cat's whiskers; dead cat bounce; play cat and mouse; like a cat on a hot tin roof; there's more than one way to skin a cat and like the cat that's got the cream*), while nine expressions simply use the lexeme *cat* in a metaphorical way (*cat call; cat fight; cat house; cat nap; copy cat; dead cat; gym cat; hell cat; and breed of cat*). From the Croatian corpus a total of nine phraseological units was extracted (*igra mačke i miša; kad mačke nema, miševi kolo vode; kupiti mačka u vreći; kao mačak oko vruće kaše; objesiti mačku o rep; stari mačak; što je preslano, mački nije drago; vući se kao krepana mačka; znatiželja je ubila mačku*). In three instances the lexeme is used figuratively, but these expressions are not classified as idioms in phraseological dictionaries (*modni mačak; žena mačka; and mačka lovi miševe*). The search of the idioms *like the cat who's got the cream* and *što je preslano, mački nije drago* resulted in no example sentences, making the total number of analysed expressions with the lexeme *cat/mačka* 32.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1. Analysis of the English lexeme *cat*

4.1.1. Literal meaning

In the enTenTen21 corpus, there is a total of 249 tokens where the lexeme *cat* denotes the animal and appears independently, i.e. does not belong to any specific expression or phrase. Given that the meaning is literal and straightforward, such sentences were not analysed. Below are some examples that best illustrate the meaning of *cat* in its primary meaning:

- (1) Our **cat** uses a litter tray but some dogs just use the footpath.

- (2) A **cat** was chasing all the mice and killing those she caught.
 (3) We share our small farm in the Milo AB region with our **cats**.

4.1.2. Non-phraseological units with figurative use of *cat*

This section contains examples where *cat* is used beyond its primary, literal meaning and appears in figurative expressions that are not classified as phraseological units. A total of ten expressions was found in the corpus, each of them appearing only once, except for *breed of cat* which had three occurrences. The table in this section shows the expressions that were identified: in eight sentences *cat* appears as a component of a compound word, in one instance it is used in combination with an adjective which serves as a modifier, and in one instance it appears in a fixed phrase. Example sentences were extracted from the corpus and explained.

| COMPOUNDS WITH <i>CAT</i> * ⁴ | <i>CAT</i> MODIFIED BY AN ADJECTIVE | FIXED PHRASES WITH <i>CAT</i> |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| cat call | dead cat | breed of cat |
| cat fight | | |
| cat house | | |
| cat nap | | |
| copy cat | | |
| gym cat | | |
| hell cat | | |
| tom cat | | |

Table 1. Non-phraseological units containing the lexeme *cat* in English

- (1) At Merrill Lynch, women were humiliated by strippers at office parties. ... At Lew Lieberbaum, there were strippers, **cat calls**, and demands for oral sex.

According to the Collins Cobuild Learner’s Dictionary (1996: 166), catcalls are “loud noises that people make to show that they disapprove of something they are watching or listening to”. Another very similar definition is “a noise or shout expressing anger at or disapproval of

⁴ *It should be noted that some of the compounds listed in the table are present in the form of a closed or hyphenated compound in dictionaries, but due to the way the lexeme was searched in the corpus, they appeared as an open compound. Although there is a difference in the way the compounds are shown, the analysis led to the conclusion that the open compounds from the example sentences carry the meaning listed in the corpus, i.e. that the context of the sentence fits the dictionary definition. Also, it should be kept in mind that the register and style of most sentences is informal and that they were not written by linguists or language experts, but rather by individuals who might not be acquainted with the correct forms and rules.

somebody who is speaking or performing in public” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English 2010: 228). The example sentence using this compound does not provide enough context to understand whether there is a person doing something that would possibly merit shouts of disapproval and dissatisfaction from the crowd, indicating that the compound might have another meaning. A definition that could possibly fit the context of this sentence was found in Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary (n.d.a.), which defines it as “a loud, sexually suggestive call or comment directed at someone publicly (as on the street).” What can be concluded about the sentence upon reviewing this definition is that employees at two mentioned companies, more specifically female employees, are verbally harassed by their male coworkers, which makes them feel uncomfortable and unsafe at their workplace.

According to the Online Etymology Dictionary (n.d.a), the term originates from a type of instrument that produces hissing and growling noises similar to those made by cats and it was formerly used to convey displeasure in theatres. The definitions and etymology of the compound word lead to the conclusion that the nominal compound was inspired by the loud vocal sounds produced by cats to get the attention of someone, and in the context of the example sentence, these noises or comments are of sexual nature. Thus, the idea of a cat making loud noises is used to convey the idea of loud verbal harassment directed towards women, and the lexeme *cat* is detached from its literal sense, negatively contributing to the metaphorical meaning of the compound.

(2) Critics of *Self Made* could not contain their indignation over Walker's life narrative being twisted into a colorism-fueled **cat fight**, an early 1900s *Real Housewives*.

The meaning of this nominal compound is pretty straightforward and Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (2003: 195) defines it as “an intense fight or argument especially between two women”. The example sentence was taken from a website where people comment about current historical events. The article talks about the popular Netflix series *Self Made*, which tells the story of Madam C. J. Walker, the first African-American woman who became a self-made millionaire in the United States of America by selling hair-care products for black women. Besides Walker’s path to success, the series also shows her rivalry with her mentor Addie Monroe, another self-made millionaire and the person who introduced Walker to the hair industry.

As per the Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.a), *cat* is used in its primary meaning referring to the feline creature, but taking into consideration the meaning of the compound, it is evident that

the lexeme is extended metaphorically here to create a meaning beyond the literal one. The compound does not refer to a literal physical altercation between two cats, but uses this image to denote a quarrel and bad rapports between two people of the female gender. This term was most likely motivated by the quarrelsome nature of cats who usually fight over territory and whose fights are very dramatic, intense, and vocal (growls and hisses). Also, these animals will typically use their claws and teeth to attack their opponent. When it comes to fights between humans, they can also be physical and/or verbal. Stereotypically, women are perceived as more inclined to participate in verbal conflicts than men, and their fights can be very loud and emotionally charged. This is why the expression generally applies to women rather than men and the lexeme carries a sexist and negative connotation.

(3) I wouldn't have him running a **cat house**!

In the literal sense, a *cat house* could be understood as a house, usually made from wood, that is designed for cats to sleep in. However, in the excerpted sentence, the compound appears as part of the verbal phrase *to run a cat house*, which implies that some sort of house is being operated or managed, and that cannot be a house for cats. The Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English (2003: 189) defines the informal and colloquial compound *cat house* as a brothel, that is, an establishment where women offer sexual services to men in exchange for money. The origin of this slang term is rather interesting – in the 17th century, *cat* was used to refer to a whore (*A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* 1689), so linking the word *house* to it created the meaning of a place where prostitution takes place. This is another example of the lexeme carrying a negative connotation and being used in a sexual context.

(4) I had missed last month's meeting of the press club, so made a point of attending this month, even though I had to take a quick **cat nap** after work to make sure I had enough energy.

The meaning of the collocation in this sentence is rather transparent. Dictionaries describe the compound as a snooze that is taken during the day, short in duration, and light in nature, just like the one felines take (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 2003: 196).

Cats are notorious for spending most of their day sleeping, and while they can sleep uninterrupted for hours, they can also take multiple short naps during the day. This is because they spend a lot of time playing, hunting, and exploring their surroundings, which results in

loss of energy. Such behaviour is also very common for humans when they are tired as it can help them recharge and feel more energized to resume with an interrupted activity or simply get through the day. It is a great way to increase one's productivity, mood, and energy levels. Thus, the projection of a feline's behaviour to that of a human being is what makes the lexeme *cat* figurative. Here, the lexeme is used in a positive way.

- (5) But Renua are a particularly terrible **copy cat** of the American conservative right, following the same strategy of tax breaks for the super rich and conservative anti-choice social politics.

This sentence is an example that clearly shows the meaning of *copy-cat*, a term used to refer to a person who has no ideas of their own or copies the words, ideas, or actions of another person (Cambridge International Dictionary of English 1995: 305). Renua, i.e. an Irish political party, is being criticised for following and replicating the policies of the American conservative right and for doing it poorly. This implies that they lack originality and are not capable or willing to develop their own policies or strategies to deal with certain issues.

Two uses were found for the lexeme *cat* within this compound. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.b.), the lexeme is used in its secondary sense as *cat* can be a synonym, i.e. a derogatory term for "human being". However, the Online Etymology Dictionary (n.d.b) associates *cat* in this compound with its primary meaning denoting the animal, leading to the conclusion that the lexeme might have undergone a metaphorical extension due to similar behaviour between felines, who are widely believed to closely observe and mimic the behaviour they see, and humans. While there is a possibility that the compound was in fact motivated by the imitative nature of an animal, according to Siegelberg (2011) there are other animals associated with this type of behaviour, indicating that *cat* is simply used in its secondary sense which denotes an annoying person.

- (6) With the grace and swagger of a seasoned prizefighter, the **gym cat** took center ring shortly before the first fight was set to begin.

The meaning of *gym cat* was not found in any traditional dictionary, but an explanation was found in the Urban Dictionary (2018)⁵, which describes it as a woman who frequently visits the gym to work out and get in shape rather than to get to know men and flirt with them. As it has already been explained on the example of *cat house*, *cat* could refer to a woman with high

⁵ <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Gym%20cat> [Accessed 6th May 2024]

sexual desires and intentions, but given that the found definition of *gym cat* emphasises the innocent intentions of the woman, it can be concluded that this negative meaning is cancelled out, and the lexeme simply refer to a female person. However, the term could also denote a male person (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 2003: 193). Without additional context it is difficult to infer the gender of the person, but what is clear is that *cat* is used figuratively and positively to refer to someone who spends a lot of time in the gym, i.e. has a strong work ethic and cares about their physical well-being.

This expression is a modification of the established expression *gym rat*, also conveying the meaning of a fitness enthusiast. It is questionable whether an animal, whether a cat or a rat, served as a motivation for this compound and whether there is some sort of connection with humans, meaning that the lexeme is detached from its literal sense denoting the animal and extended metaphorically to refer to a male or female person. Cats are known for being flexible, agile, and fit, and a person who frequently works out might embody these traits, making the use of *cat* fitting here.

(7) Although Solomon, like other male slave narrative authors, does try to expose a more gentle side of his mistress, McQueen paints her as the "**hell cat**" and "devil" that former slave women, in their own narratives, are so eager to commit to public memory.

Hell cat refers to the mistress mentioned in the example sentence and the compound is defined as "a violently temperamental person, especially an ill-tempered woman" (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 2003: 578). Another definition is "a woman with magic powers derived from evil sources" (Collins Dictionary, n.d.). The animal cat is used to describe the personality of a person, more specifically a woman, as they can both be perceived as wild, fierce, and difficult to control. Cats have long been associated with females, so it is not a surprise that their traits or behaviours are applied to the female gender. Thus, what can be concluded is that the literal and primary meaning denoting the animal becomes metaphorical because it denotes a woman in this particular compound, and the lexeme carries a negative connotation.

(8) Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was born on 15 August 1875 at 15 Theobalds Road, Holborn, London – just round the corner from Fetter Lane, a spot which Dickens described as the "dingiest collection of shabby buildings ever squeezed together in a rank corner as a club for **tom cats**".

The majority of dictionaries describe *tom cat* as a male domestic cat (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 2003: 1315). The origin of the term is most likely linked to the children's book "The Life and Adventures of a Cat" from 1760, where the main character was a feline named Tom (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.c). However, it is highly unlikely that cats visit clubs, indicating that there might be a different meaning to the collocation. *Tom cat* could also mean "a sexually active male" as defined by McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expressions (2006: 370). This meaning is probably motivated by the fact that male cats like to wander around in search for female cats to mate with. A club for tom cats mentioned in the sentence could be a place where promiscuous men who share such behaviour gather. Given that the expression denotes a person, the meaning of *cat* is used beyond its literal sense and the lexeme carries a negative connotation.

(9) I tell them: Think of Googling as walking into a hoarder's garage: you may stumble across the whole run of Encyclopedia Britannica, or you may find a **dead cat**.

There are a few definitions for the expression *dead cat*. One is "a piece of violent or jeering criticism"; "an insulting or abusive expression of disapproval" (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, n.d.b). Another meaning is "an unpleasant or difficult matter that needs to be dealt with urgently and conclusively" (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.c). A third meaning was found in the Dictionary of American Slang (1967: 141), which defines it as "a lion, tiger, or leopard that does not perform, but is merely exhibited". However, none of these definitions seem to fit the context of the example sentence. It is likely that the combination of these words does not form a compound, but rather the noun *cat* simply modified by the adjective *dead* with the meaning of a feline who is no longer alive, alluding to the uselessness of such animal.

This sentence is extracted from an interview with a university professor in which she speaks about the issue of students using Google as their main source of information. The idea of a cat that is no longer alive is used metaphorically to represent the idea of coming across useless, incorrect, or even unpleasant information, whereas the Encyclopedia Britannica symbolises useful, accurate and credible information. So, what is meant by the sentence is that one can find both useful and useless information online, but has to be cautious about what he or she believes.

(10) Still, Lindy's call was a different **breed of cat**.

In this context, *cat* has an interesting use. The expression *breed of cat* is equivalent to "type" or "sort" (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary, n.d.c). What is meant by this phrase is that the

phone call that Lindy received is peculiar in some way, either positively or negatively, which is difficult to infer from this sentence alone. The call could have had a great impact on Lindy or could have dealt with an unusual topic, making it different from the calls she usually receives. The expression was likely motivated by the fact that there are many different breeds of cats and that each breed is special in its own way, so it emphasizes the uniqueness of something. Therefore, the fact that many breeds of cats exist motivated this phrase and meaning.

4.2. Analysis of the Croatian lexeme *mačka*

4.2.1. Literal meaning

The search of *mačka* in the hrWaC 2.2 corpus resulted in over 550 tokens in which the lexeme is used in a literal sense, in its primary meaning, and is not part of a fixed expression. Some example sentences are:

- (1) **Mačke** su vrlo teritorijalne i vole odrediti granice svog teritorija u odnosu na one drugih mačaka.
- (2) **Mačke** su odane i prijateljske, a lako se i brinuti za njih.
- (3) Nakon što ju je uhvatila i najmanja kišica **mačka** će dobrih četvrt sata čistiti i njegovati krzno.

4.2.2. Non-phraseological units with figurative use of *mačka*

Out of a total of 600 tokens that were analysed, *mačka* was used figuratively in only three instances in the Croatian corpus. It appears once in a compound word, once in combination with an adjective, and in one instance it does not belong to a fixed phrase or expression. Again, the sentences were extracted from the corpus and the sentences were analysed.

| COMPOUNDS WITH <i>MAČKA</i> | <i>MAČKA</i> MODIFIED BY AN ADJECTIVE |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| žena mačka | modni mačak |

Table 2. Non-phraseological units containing the lexeme *mačka* in Croatian

- (1) Svaki gledatelj filma imat će mogućnost osmisliti slogan koji najbolje povezuje **Ženu mačku** i mobitel i osvojiti vrijedne nagrade, kroz cijeli listopad i studeni.

The compound *žena mačka* is used to describe a woman who is like a cat, i.e. shares some similarities with the animal, such as behaviour or appearance. In the example sentence, it most

likely refers to a fictional character appearing in the comic book *Batman* or in movies given that the first component of the compound is capitalised. The woman exhibits cat-like behaviour and although she does not physically resemble the animal, her clothes do. This character is typically dressed all in black, wears a headpiece with cat ears or a cat eye mask, and carries a whip.

(2) Hoćemo li kvalitetnog političara odbaciti jer nema uz sebe **Modnog Mačka**?

Modni mačak (lit. *fashion cat*) is a figurative expression used to denote a person, usually a man, who has a high sense of fashion, follows the latest trends and dresses with great style. This is a man who cares about his own appearance and how he presents himself to the public, but also about the appearance of others. Being a fashion critic and stylist, a “fashion cat” can advise public figures such as actors, musicians, politicians, and others on how to dress and look good in public, which is shown by the example sentence. Having a personal stylist could, but does not necessarily have to mean looking more put together and the sentence suggests that the lack of one does not make a politician less skilful or able to perform their job.

Cats are not directly associated with fashion and style, but it is possible that their physical appearance and behaviour gave rise to this expression. They are perceived as elegant and graceful creatures, both in terms of movement and appearance. These two traits can also be attributed to individuals, for example those who dress nicely and have a good taste in clothes. Adhering to fashion trends may lead to standing out via one’s clothing choices, similarly to how a cat can attract attention due to the colour of its fur or some interesting spots it has. Thus, it can be concluded that the expression was motivated by some similarities between cats and humans.

(3) U ekonomiji je tako važno da **mačka** lovi miševe, a ne koje je boje, dok to ne shvatimo i prihvatimo, bit će nam ovako.

Cat here has an interesting use and it is clear that it is used metaphorically. Cats and mice have a predator-prey relationship, with one species (cat) having dominance and power over the other (mouse). With this in mind, there are several interpretations of this sentence, all in the context of economics. Firstly, a cat could symbolize politicians, economists, and others who are in charge of solving relevant issues and ensuring the growth of a country. Mice could therefore stand for the issues a country needs to resolve or the goals it wants to achieve. To say that the colour of the cats is irrelevant means that it does not matter who these individuals are, for

example what political beliefs they have, as long as they are doing their job effectively and taking the necessary actions and measures to ensure the economic growth of their country. A cat chasing mice could also refer to sellers chasing new buyers, meaning that it is irrelevant what product or service they are offering, as long as they are gaining profit. The third interpretation is that the animal stands for large corporations, who benefit from taking over small companies in the sense that they acquire new customers in a wider geographical area (market expansion), gain new products, services, or ideas, and finally, eliminate competition.

4.3. Phraseological units with the lexeme *cat/mačka* in English and Croatian

This section contains phraseological units with the lexeme *cat/mačka* found in the corpus. Due to the large number that was found, it was decided that they would be analysed separately. These expressions differ from the ones analysed in the previous section in that they are established expressions found in various phraseological dictionaries (except for the Croatian idiom *znatiželja je ubila mačku*), whereas the expressions from the previous section were found in standard dictionaries. Within all of these units the lexeme *cat/mačka* is used in a figurative way and contributes to the idiomatic meaning of the expression. The expressions that will be analysed in this section are the following:

| ENGLISH IDIOMS | CROATIAN IDIOMS |
|---|----------------------------------|
| be a fat cat | igra mačke i miša |
| be the cat's whiskers | kad mačke nema, miševi kolo vode |
| bell the cat | kao mačak oko vruće kaše |
| dead cat bounce | kupiti mačka u vreći |
| like a cat on a hot tin roof | objesiti mačku o rep |
| like herding cats | stari mačak |
| let the cat out of the bag | vući se kao krepana mačka |
| play cat and mouse (with) | znatiželja je ubila mačku |
| put the cat among the pigeons | |
| raining cats and dogs | |
| smile like a Cheshire cat | |
| there's more than one way to skin a cat | |

Table 3. Phraseological units containing the lexeme *cat/mačka* in English and Croatian

BE A FAT CAT

(1) The tailored clothing is also slim-fit too, though at nearly a grand for a sport coat, you'll need to **be a fat cat** to afford them.

(2) Basically, if you are at home, you always want that road team to **be a fat cat** contented team coming off a string of victories.

A fat cat is someone who is “ostentatiously and smugly wealthy” (McGraw-Hill’s Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs 2005: 204), for example a politician or a businessman. This is a derogatory slang term used to express disapproval because of the unfair way someone uses their wealth and power (Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Idioms 1995: 62). The first use of this term can be traced back to the 1920s, when it was used in a political context to describe “a wealthy contributor to a political campaign fund” (Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary 2003: 456). Now, the idiom is applied to any individual who is rich, influential, and privileged.

The expression is non-literal because the combination of *fat* and *cat* does not denote an overweight cat, but rather a rich person. However, the idiomatic meaning does come from the literal image of an overweight cat. Fatness indicates that the animal is well fed (with food), taken care of, and contented, which is a symbol for a comfortable and easy life. A fat cat is also be associated greediness and laziness. A person who is extremely rich can also be imagined as having a large protruding belly, in this case full of money, being greedy and lazy due to the amount of money they have. So, by denoting a human being in this idiomatic expression, the lexeme *cat* gains an additional, metaphorical sense.

Sentence 1 shows the meaning of the idiom. The fact that they can afford one article of clothing for a thousand dollars shows that they are well-off, unlike an average person with a low income. In sentence 2, *fat cat* does not denote an individual, but rather a whole team of football players who are satisfied with their success and series of victories. It has to do with the mental condition of the team rather than the financial one, which is interesting. Due to multiple wins in a row, the road team is “well fed” and not eager for victory, meaning that they might get too comfortable in the games to come and show a decrease in performance. The sentence implies that the home team would rather compete against players that are as contented as a fat cat after several consecutive victories as this would mean poorer performance and victory for the home team.

BE THE CAT’S WHISKERS

(4) "I hate to get all stupid and giddy over a boy, of all things, but I just think he's **the cat's whiskers**, you know?"

(5) I am not interested in the 'poly wannabees' or those who think themselves as being 'entitled' in any way - immature men for whom polygamy goes to their heads and who think they're **the cat's whiskers** simply because they have a Y-chromosome in their nucleoplasm, or carnal women who think they should be 'compensated' for sharing their husband by being put up on a pedistal or because modern culture says they are superior to men and should rule.

(6) Tucking into any sort of pork and beans creation on a bed of fluffy mash or toppled onto a crust of sourdough toast is **the cat's whiskers**, especially when the weather is getting chilly and you are craving something warm and cosy, straight out of the oven.

To be the cat's whiskers is an interesting way of pointing out the excellence or importance of something or someone (Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Idioms 1995: 62). The use of *cat* to convey greatness and superiority can be linked to the significance of whiskers to this animal, leading to the conclusion that *cat* is used here figuratively in connection to the primary meaning denoting the animal. Serving as a sensory tool to help them navigate and perceive their surroundings, whiskers are essential to cats, so this is a clever way to express that someone or something is valuable to us or that it is the best of its kind.

Sentences 4 and 5 show the use of the idiom in reference to a person. Taking into consideration the meaning of the idiom, the lexeme *cat* typically has a positive connotation within it (sentences 4 and 6), but the idiom can also carry a negative connotation (sentence 5). By referring to the guy as the cat's whiskers, the speaker in sentence 4 is expressing her admiration and affinity towards him, perhaps because he is very good looking or has great qualities. The following sentence has a negative tone as there is a sense of disliking towards those who have a high opinion of themselves and think they are better than others. The expression can also be used to refer to an inanimate object, as shown by example sentence 6, which is in this case a pork and beans dish. The speaker thinks this dish is outstanding and the ideal comfort food for cold weather.

BELL THE CAT

(7) I think it's high time that defecating or urinating in the open or on road sides must be made punishable, but who will **bell the cat**? If such a regulation is made mandatory, all state govts will have to allocate huge sums to build the millions of toilets required.

The meaning of this idiom is to be brave enough to "do something that is usually dangerous and that will benefit everyone" (Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms 2010: 25). According to

the Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (1960: 153), another meaning is "to make a common enemy harmless". This saying originated from a famous fable in which a group of mice are planning on hanging a bell around the neck of a cat who is constantly attacking them as a way to warn them of the cat's approach, but no one is willing to perform this risky action (Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms 2010: 25). This indicated that the animal represents some sort of danger or risk.

From example sentence 7, it is evident that the cat metaphorically symbolizes the issue of the lack of public toilets which causes people to defecate and urinate on the streets. In the blog post the sentence was taken from, it was mentioned that the government refuses to enforce penalties or build more toilets, so the question is who from the citizens is willing to take action and do something about the issue.

DEAD CAT BOUNCE

(8) While listening to a stock market report, one of the reporters referred to a mild run-up on a stock during after hours trading as a **dead cat bounce**.

This idiom is widely used in the economics and finance sector to refer to a misleading and short-term recovery in stock prices after a long period of decline, which leads investors to think that it is safe to buy shares and profit from the rise in value.

Although *cat* is used in its primary meaning denoting the feline creature, in this expression it takes a figurative meaning and has a negative connotation. The idiom was created by Wall Street brokers and motivated by the image of a lifeless cat slightly bouncing off the ground before it remains completely motionless when dropped (Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms 2010: 89). Although any animal or even object could bounce if thrown from a significant altitude, the choice of a cat is not completely random. It is related to the belief that felines always land on their feet and have the ability to "bounce back" after a fall. However, if a cat is dead, it will still bounce because this is a natural reaction and not an indication that the animal is alive. Similarly, a stock or market that is experiencing a long-lasting decline can also experience a small bounce, but that does not necessarily mean that this upward spike will persist and that the situation will get better. The combination with the adjective *dead* emphasizes the notion that the bounce of the animal is meaningless, just like the brief recovery in the context of finances and economics. Therefore, *cat* denotes the concept of deception within this idiom and works together with the adjective *dead* and the noun *bounce*.

LIKE A CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

(9) Lucas looked **like a cat on a hot tin roof**, the way he kept stepping from one foot to the other and you could see sweat streaming down his face.

(10) Nicky was **like a cat on a hot tin roof**; this was a special birthday treat for her and, whilst she'd been a fan of the man and his music for some 15 years, had never actually been to a live gig.

A single meaning was found in a number of dictionaries for *like a cat on a hot tin roof*, which is according to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2003: 231) to be anxious or nervous to the extent that you cannot keep still nor focus on something. Generally, the idiom is used to describe a nervous emotional state, as seen from example sentence 9. However, the expression could also be used to denote excitement in a positive way, like in sentence 10.

The figurative sense is conveyed through the image of an actual cat walking on a hot tin roof. Because their paws are very sensitive, when they come into contact with a scorching surface, a natural reaction is to frantically move around or hop up and down to minimize the discomfort. Humans exhibit a similar behaviour when worried or nervous, i.e. they are unable to stand still in one place. Thus, the metaphorical extension is achieved by using an animal to represent a person in a restless state or the state of distress in general. When it comes to choosing the animal cat in this particular idiom, there are a few possible reasons for it – curious nature, sensitivity of paws, and quick reflexes and movements of cats.

LIKE HERDING CATS

(11) "Sometimes coordinating volunteers can **be like herding cats**, but what we've accomplished here has been truly inspiring," said project lead, BLM's Ryan Beatty, Fisheries Biologist.

In this simile, the lexeme *cat* is used with the purpose of conveying the idea of a chaotic or frustrating situation. It is used when we want to say that something, for example a large group of people, is impossible or almost impossible to control, organize, or lead (Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English 1985: 61). As it can be seen from the example sentence, the leader of a project is stating that managing and getting a large number of people who are assigned different tasks to cooperate and work together in a coordinated manner is not always easy. The reason for this is the diverse and independent nature of the involved individuals. Even though being a team leader seemed chaotic and undoable at times, they managed to accomplish something remarkable.

The motivation behind this idiom stems from the animal's behaviour and unruly nature. Cats are usually not cooperative, so trying to get them to do what we want is often futile and requires a lot of time, effort, and patience. They have minds of their own and each one will want to do its own thing, making the attempt to control one cat extremely difficult, let alone several. This is why cats are compared to humans and are associated with the concept of chaos in this particular idiom. It is also interesting that *cat* is paired with the verb *herd* which only emphasizes the difficulty of a situation and these two words work together to create the non-literal meaning of the idiom. Thus, extending the literal and primary meaning of the lexeme *cat* to an abstract concept affects the overall meaning of the expression and makes it idiomatic.

LET THE CAT OUT OF THE BAG

- (12) Yesterday, actor Billie Piper appeared to **let the cat out of the bag** when she referred to Solomons as Kylie's "fiancé" in an interview with ELLE UK.
- (13) We won't **let the cat out of the bag**, but watch for details that promise to make our official ceremonies some of the most entertaining and exciting ever.
- (14) So **let the cat out of the bag** at the beginning so they know what you are talking about right from the start.

By definition, the idiom *to let the cat out of the bag* means to reveal something that is not known yet or that was not supposed to be revealed, at least not for some time (Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Idioms 1995: 63) This can be done intentionally or by accident. Reviewing sentences from the corpus, it was concluded that there are some nuances in the meaning, with *cat* symbolizing different things. Sentence 12 is a good example of the animal symbolizing a secret and a surprise, as the couple wanted to keep their relationship private, but the information was accidentally revealed to the public by a third person. In the following example, *cat* also denotes confidential information that is purposefully withheld until the appropriate time to reveal it comes. This can be done in order to create suspense and excitement about the announcement that is about to come, and a sense of mystery is created. In sentence 3, *cat* does not symbolize a secret, but rather relevant information regarding a topic that should be given upfront. Even though there are some differences in the context, in all of these sentences *cat* is used to represent an abstract concept.

The lexeme has a metaphorical purpose as the idea of secrecy is conveyed through an animal. The choice of this animal in this particular idiom is not arbitrary. The idiom could have historical origins and stem from the common medieval practice of deceiving customers at markets. Vendors would often replace a valuable piglet with an animal of a similar size and

weight but less value, usually a cat. At that time, it was not uncommon for buyers to settle on a price without previously inspecting the contents of the bag and when they would open it at home, they would find out that they have been scammed. So, letting the cat out of the bag meant exposing the fraud and revealing the truth (Allen's Dictionary of English Phrases 2006: 136). The association of cats with secrecy can also be linked to the animal's curious nature, as they are known to hide in all sorts of places. A concealed cat coming out of its hiding place is analogous to a confidential information escaping from the mouth of a person. This shows the connection between the animal and the abstract concept it represents, that is, how the literal and primary meaning of *cat* gained a figurative meaning in this idiom. Also, it can be said that the lexeme has a negative connotation as disclosing something that was not supposed to be disclosed is viewed as problematic.

PLAY CAT AND MOUSE (WITH)

(15) According to the CBC, hundreds of protesters were **playing cat and mouse with** the Montreal police on Wednesday.

This idiom exists in multiple forms (*play (a game of) cat and mouse (with)*, *a cat and mouse game*) and essentially refers to two individuals or parties that are pursuing and trying to defeat each other, with one party having power and dominance over the other (The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms 2003: 817). The idiomatic meaning stems from the image of a cat playing with a mouse, i.e. the predator-prey relationship that these two animals have, which is used to describe interaction between humans. This shows that *cat* is used in its literal and primary meaning denoting the animal, but has a figurative purpose within this expression as it symbolizes the pursuer and the dominant party in a certain situation.

Cats are known for being natural hunters and hunting animals smaller than them, such as rodents, birds, and similar. Also, they will often play with their prey before killing it, and a common way to do so is by trapping the mouse with their claws, releasing it, and then catching it again, repeating this action multiple times. This shows how the stronger side may tease, manipulate, and use various tactics to outsmart the other side, which is often conveyed with this idiom.

The example sentence describes a situation where the police are trying to catch a large number of protesters on the streets, presumably due to violating some laws or disobeying orders. The police, who enforce law and order, are the dominant side in this situation and the pursuers

of a group of protesters. In order to catch them, they most likely have to resort to various strategies, but the protesters might also trick the police in various ways to avoid getting arrested or fined, which resembles a game between a cat and a mouse where both parties are trying to defeat each other.

PUT THE CAT AMONG THE PIGEONS

(16) Prime Minister Stephen Harper **put the cat among the pigeons** in a speech in Davos on Thursday, saying he intends to do to government-funded pensions what he did to health care transfers – limit their growth.

The idiom *to put the cat among the pigeons*, commonly used in British English, carries the meaning of “to do or say something that causes trouble and makes a lot of people angry or worried” (Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms 1998: 61). The animal symbolizes here a disruptive or disturbing element that is brought into a tranquil setting with the aim of causing chaos and dismay. The idiom can be used in a variety of contexts, such as politics, business, sports, or relationships, and generally the lexeme has a negative semantic value in all of these contexts.

If an animal such as a cat, who is a natural hunter and known for catching and killing birds, is placed in the same environment as pigeons (who are believed to symbolize peace), this will most likely disrupt the pigeons’ peace and cause them to scatter in panic. A similar effect is created by some actions or words, and the example sentence clearly illustrates the meaning of the idiom and how the element *cat* contributes to the overall negative tone. The sentence suggests that there is a strong negative reaction among citizens, which is caused by the Canadian Prime Minister’s statement about changing the current pension policy. Reading the source the sentence was taken from, it becomes clear that the measure the Prime Minister wants to take is increase the age limit to enter the “Old Age Security” program⁶, meaning that citizens would have to wait until the age of 67 instead of 65 to be able to benefit from it. This naturally disturbed the already calm situation.

The origin of this idiom is not completely clear as records in dictionaries were not found, but one theory is that it was inspired by a popular form of entertainment in India where a cat would be placed in the same enclosure as a flock of pigeons, and people would then bet on the number of birds the cat would kill with one swipe. This activity originated at the time India was

⁶A program which offers monthly payments to senior citizens that meet certain requirements.

under British rule, so it is possible that this is how the phrase originated in the English language and acquired a metaphorical sense (The Times of India, 2006).

RAINING CATS AND DOGS

(17) We all hate it when our pants get wet from puddles, so it's necessary to wear them cropped, folded or tucked in our shoes when it's **raining cats and dogs**.

(18) Leno: "It is **raining cats and dogs** for so many who have seen services upon which they and their families depend for their very existence today."

Allen's Dictionary of English Phrases (2006: 137) defines this idiom as raining heavily and continuously. Upon research, it has been established that the lexeme *cat* appears as part of the adverb *cats and dogs* meaning "in great quantities" or "very hard" (Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary 2003: 196), which together with the verb *to rain* give rise to an expression with a figurative nature. The phrase conveys the idea of something heavy falling from the sky, which is not so far from the reality as water droplets can feel heavy when it rains in large quantities and with great force, leading to the conclusion that the word choice is suitable.

As seen from example sentence 17, the idiom is used in the context of bad weather. However, in sentence 18, the idiom carries a different meaning which is "to face challenges" meaning that the lexeme is used in the context of a difficult situation. By symbolizing abstract concepts such as abundance and intensity in the case of example sentence 17 and the concepts of chaos and difficulty in the case of sentence 18, the lexeme *cat* has a figurative purpose and plays an integral role in emphasizing the extremeness or severity of a situation, regardless of the context.

Considering the general meaning that the idiom carries, the choice of the lexeme can be attributed to both mythological and historical origins. According to one assumption, cats and dogs were believed to have a significant impact on the weather in Nordic mythology, with cats symbolizing heavy rain and dogs the wind (The Free Dictionary, n.d.). A more popular theory originates from the 16th century when the roofs of peasant houses were made out of thatch. Animals would often sleep on top of the roof or on the rafters below the roof, so whenever there would be intense rain, the force would push them down. Some relate the idiom to poor drainage systems in the 17th century, which caused the water from a rainfall to accumulate and flood the streets. Animals on the street would therefore drown in the water and this created the image that cats and dogs fell down from the sky along with the rain (Oxford Dictionary of Idioms 2004: 236).

SMILE LIKE A CHESHIRE CAT

(19) The thought of actually riding in his dream car with a pro driver at 200 m.p.h. made him **smile like a Cheshire cat** for weeks – and even finish his homework.

To smile or grin like a Cheshire cat means to smile from ear to ear and in a way that makes someone look foolish or overly contented with themselves (The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms 2003: 442). ‘Cheshire cat’ most likely refers to the fictional character from Lewis Carroll’s novel *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* who is known for having a broad, fixed, and mischievous grin (Oxford Dictionary of Idioms 2004: 51). By describing a type of facial expression or behaviour, cat is detached from its literal meaning denoting the animal and contributes to the idiomaticity of the expression.

THERE’S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SKIN A CAT

(20) **There's more than one way to skin a cat**, and regime change without the guns a-blazin' is a heck of a lot cheaper and probably, in the long run, more successful.

This is a proverb which means that an aim, whether easy or difficult, can be achieved in many different ways, not just one or the traditional way (Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms 2010: 85). The animal symbolically represents a goal, problem, or task that can be approached in various ways or solved using various methods and the end result will be the same. The example sentence suggests that the regime can be changed in a peaceful or a non-peaceful way, opting for the first one.

The origin of this proverb is not so clear and there is no mutual agreement between etymologists on how the phrase originated, but according to one theory the phrase comes from the practice of skinning animals to make clothes or for consumption. The “more than one way” part of the proverb refers to the dilemma whether this should be done while the cat is still alive or when it is dead (Stack Exchange Network, 2011). It can be said that the phrase lost its literal sense because the custom of skinning cats became less popular and accepted over time, and *cat* gained a figurative purpose within the saying by symbolizing something that can be solved or reached in different ways, even though it is not exactly clear why the lexeme came to represent a goal or a problem. The lexeme has a neutral/positive influence on the meaning of this proverb.

IGRA MAČKE I MIŠA

(1) Bit će to ponovno **igra mačke i miša** (kao i protiv Milana) u kojoj će Barca imati barem 65% posjeda lopte i stalno napadati.

In the corpus, this Croatian idiom was found in the form of *igra mačke i miša*, but it also exists in other forms – *igrati se mačke i miša* and *igrati se kao mačka s mišem*. The meaning is the same as in the English equivalent *play cat and mouse* and the idiom is defined as a conflict between two unequal opponents where the dominant subject toys with the weaker subject (Rječnik hrvatskih animalističkih frazema 2017: 101).

Grammatically looking, the lexeme is feminine in gender and is used in the genitive case in this idiom. Just like in English, *mačka* denoting the feline creature contributes to the overall figurative meaning of the expression by describing the dynamic relationship between two sides and a situation that involves back-and-forth as well as tactical outwitting. The example sentence perfectly illustrates the meaning of this idiom where a football match is being compared to a game between a cat and a mouse. This is mainly because it is predicted that one club will have more advantage and strategically dominate over the other, just like how a cat has more power over the mouse.

KAD MAČKE NEMA, MIŠEVI KOLO VODE

(2) Imaj na umu da je Lisičar umro, a **kad mačke nema miševi kolo vode**, šta bi značilo da se današnji menadžment trudi da kupi dionice na burzi i tako pritisne Lisičarevu obitelj da mu i ostali dio preda po maloj cijeni.

The meaning of this proverb is that people will misbehave and do whatever they want in the absence of the person in charge (Hrvatsko-engleski frazeološki rječnik 2009: 132). What the animal represents here is authority, dominance, and power. The saying fully corresponds to the English proverb *when the cat's away, the mice will play* in meaning and form. The lexeme is also used in the feminine gender and genitive case here.

As already pointed out, an animal metaphor is used to portray a situation that gets out of control once the authoritative figure is not present. The only sentence from the corpus that could illustrate the meaning of the saying is sentence 2, which suggests that Lisičar was someone who was in a dominant position and had control over something, but after his death things got out of hand.

KAO MAČAK OKO VRUĆE KAŠE

(3) Bandić je naglasio da se on oko toga naslijeđenog problema već godinama vrti **kao mačak oko vruće kaše**, ali nema hrabrosti staviti potpis na posao od 200 milijuna eura bez suglasnosti građana iako su mu na nedavnim izborima dali povjerenje da vodi grad.

The lexeme *mačak* appears in a simile here and the entire phrase can be preceded by different motion verbs such as “go”, “circle”, “dance”, etc. According to Hrvatsko-engleski frazeološki rječnik (2008), there are two meanings for this idiom – (1) to be hesitant and not get straight to the point of a question, problem or situation, or do something about it and (2) to approach something with great caution (433). The example sentence conveys both meanings and the following paragraph will explain the role of *cat* within this idiom, as well as the sentence.

No data were found on the origin of this phrase, but it was likely inspired by the behaviour of cats in a certain situation, which has then been attributed to humans to make the expression idiomatic. Cats are known for being cautious creatures, especially around things they are not familiar with and that might harm them. They are also very nosy and want to inspect something that is new to them, but if they perceive it as risky or dangerous, such as a hot bowl of porridge, they will hesitate to directly approach and engage with it. With time, the animal came to represent an indecisive and cautious person, as seen from the example sentence. It suggests that Bandić has been slowly and cautiously dealing with an inherited issue, the reconstruction of a football stadium in Zagreb, and is indecisive about making a final decision, not to avoid certain risks or consequences, but because he wants to receive direct consent from the citizens before signing the contract.

KUPITI MAČKA U VREĆI

(4) Nitko ne želi **kupiti mačka u vreći**, pa je internet potrebno iskoristiti za temeljito istraživanje o aparatu koji nam se najviše sviđa.

Kupiti mačka u vreći means to buy something without previously checking and end up being deceived (Hrvatski frazeološki rječnik 2014: 306). Just like the English idiom *to let the cat out of the bag*, the expression comes from the Middle Ages and the custom of swapping a valuable animal for a worthless cat (Kovačević 2017: 25). Unlike the English idiom where the animal represents a guarded secret that should not be disclosed, here the cat symbolizes something that is unknown, unexpected, or worthless.

The example sentence shows the use of the idiom in the context of shopping and as a warning to be careful not to get tricked, so it can be inferred that the feline creature stands metaphorically for an unwanted surprise, as well as the risk of purchasing a product without having enough information on it or seeing it. The sentence emphasizes the importance of using the internet to gather as much information as possible about the product we want to purchase so that we do not get deceived and end up with something that we did not expect, is faulty, or has less value than the thing we wanted. Therefore, the idiomatic meaning of the phrase comes from a historic event.

STARI MAČAK

(5) Kandidaturu je istakao ambiciozni bivši Vatreni Igor Štimac koji ima svoje poklonike i adute, ali i **stari mačak**, iskusni Vlatko Marković, nije bez izgleda.

This idiom describes a resourceful and wise person with lots of experience in a certain field (Hrvatski frazeološki rječnik 2014: 307). At first thought it seems like *mačak* is used in its secondary meaning denoting a male person, but given that dictionaries list different animals in this expression (fox, rabbit, wolf, etc.), it is safe to conclude that the primary and literal meaning denoting the domesticated animal took on a figurative one. This is achieved by metaphorically mapping the traits of an animal onto those of a human being, more precisely a male person. The lexeme here is used in the masculine gender and nominative case.

This idiom was likely motivated by the cunning and predatory nature of cats, as well as their ability to adapt to new situations. The example sentence shows the idiom being used to refer to Vlatko Marković, one of the candidates for president of the Croatian Football Federation. Although there is not much context, it can be assumed that he is called *stari mačak* because he has been in the sports field for a long time and already has a lot of knowledge and experience in leading the federation.

VUĆI SE KAO KREPANA MAČKA

(6) Iako, nije mi drago što šiziš, da me krivo ne shvatiš, jer po sebi vidim kako se to odražava na fizičko / duševno zdravlje - ja sam već tjednima stalno loše, prehlada prešla u bronhitis, **vučem se ko krepana mačka**, nemam volje ni za što, depra, psihički u komi, stalno me oblijeva hladan znoj (to je sve psihosomatski znam - poludila sam).

(7) Svibanjsko jutro, žubore proljetne vode, sipi sitno siva magla dima iz fabrike cementa, **vuče se kao krepana mačka** iznad sivih, kišom ispranih ruševina razorenog grada.

The lexeme *mačka* has a significant role in creating the figurative sense of this expression with the meaning of moving extremely slowly and heavily (Hrvatski frazeološki rječnik 2014: 308). By using the adjective *krepana* with *mačka*, which can either translate to “dead” or “deprived of energy”, the image of an animal that is barely walking and dragging itself on the floor is created, adding to the negative and morbid tone of the idiom. The idiom is used to describe the slow pace of movement, usually of a person because of tiredness, sickness, or something similar (example sentence 6), but it can also be used to describe the movement of an inanimate object, like fog in the case of example sentence 7.

OBJESITI MAČKU O REP

(8) Badava ti sve te diplome draga, **objesi ih mačku o rep.**

In this idiom, *mačka* is used in the masculine gender and the dative case. Once again, the literal and primary meaning denoting the animal is used in a metaphorical sense. This is another idiom that exists in various forms (*možeš vezati / objesiti / okačiti to mačku za / o / na rep; veži / objesi / okači to mačku za / o / na rep*) and it indicates uselessness or pointlessness, i.e. one’s futile effort (Hrvatski frazeološki rječnik 2014: 307). No data were found on the etymology of this idiom nor is it clear what exactly inspired its creation, the only plausible explanation is that it comes from the idea that hanging something on a cat’s tail is completely futile and serves no purpose. This meaning is conveyed by the example sentence, which suggests that one’s effort and time to obtain multiple diplomas is futile because they actually have no value and are useless.

ZNATIŽELJA JE UBILA MAČKU

(9) Za sada infekcija nije alarmantna poput Slammera, no virus je u divljini pa treba biti na pojačanom oprezu. **Znatiželja je ubila mačku**, kaže Graham Cluley iz Sophosa, stoga upozoravamo korisnike da ne otvaraju datoteke za koje nisu sigurni što skrivaju.

This Croatian idiom is completely equivalent to the English *curiosity killed the cat* and it was most likely taken from the English language. This indicates that this is a case of a loantranslation, i.e. an expression borrowed from another language and translated word-for-word. However, the idiom was not found in any of the phraseological dictionaries that were

consulted, meaning that it is not recognized by lexicographers, even though it is widely used by Croatian speakers and was found in the corpus.

Essentially, the meaning of the idiom is that excessive curiosity is not good and can lead to negative and unwanted consequences, for example picking up a computer virus when opening a suspicious file as shown by the example sentence. It is clear that the phrase stems from the feline's innate curiosity and the lexeme is used to symbolize a very nosy person, making it figurative and not literal. The lexeme is used in the female gender and accusative case.

5. DISCUSSION

The corpus-based study of the lexeme *cat/mačka* provided important insights into how it is used, in what kind of expressions it appears, and what kind of meanings it can have in combination with other lexemes in the English and Croatian language.

The first conclusion that was drawn upon reviewing the first 600 tokens in each corpus is that in the majority of the sentences, the lexeme is used in its basic and literal meaning denoting the domesticated or wild animal, without any new or figurative senses being attributed to it. In these sentences the lexeme is either used in isolation or is modified by an adjective which gives more information about the animal's appearance, behaviour, or home status. This demonstrates that the use of the literal sense of the lexeme is much more frequent than the figurative one.

In a smaller number of tokens, the lexeme appears in various combinations with other lexemes which create fixed (compounds, idioms) or non-fixed expressions and the literal meaning of the lexeme gains a metaphorical sense. In the enTenTen21 corpus, it has been established that the lexeme *cat* is used metaphorically in a total of 22 expressions (12 phraseological units and 10 non-phraseological units), while in the hrWaC corpus *mačka* had a figurative purpose in only 11 expressions (8 phraseological units and 3 non-phraseological units). The difference in the number can be attributed to the fact that the English text corpus is much larger than the Croatian one (over 3.5 million hits vs. over 50 thousand hits for the lexeme *cat/mačka*). This means that there is a higher chance of the lexeme *cat* appearing in figurative expressions in the English corpus and that English speakers use this lexeme in a metaphorical way more frequently than Croatian speakers.

In some English compounds it has been established that *cat* does not carry the meaning of "animal". The first component of the compound *cat house* denotes a "prostitute", while in copy *cat* the second component means "person". In some compounds the lexeme has a gendered connotation. For example, *cat call*, *cat fight*, *hell cat*, *gym cat* and *žena mačka* are expressions

used to describe the female gender. On the other hand, *tom cat* and *modni mačak* are used to describe the male gender.

The corpus study has also shown that there is a significant difference in the expressions in which the lexeme appears, indicating that they are language-specific, but not necessarily culture-specific. For example, in both cultures the idea of taking a short nap during the day just like cats do exists, but while the English language uses the zoonymic component to describe this kind of sleep, Croatian does not.

When it comes to phraseological units involving the lexeme *cat/mačka*, there are similarities and differences in the two languages in terms of what the animal came to represent within them. Firstly, the English idiom *play cat and mouse* (verb phrase) and the Croatian *igra mačke i miša* (noun phrase) differ slightly in form, but convey the same meaning. The idioms are motivated by the predator-prey relationship between a cat and a mouse, and by representing a dominant and powerful person or entity, the lexeme *cat/mačka* becomes detached from its primary meaning and gains a figurative purpose. The idioms *let the cat out of the bag* and *kupiti mačka u vreći* were inspired by the same historical event and even though these two idioms do not convey the same meaning, the animal represents similar concepts. In the former one the cat symbolizes a secret, while in the latter one it symbolizes something unknown, unexpected, and risky.

The remaining idioms that were analysed are not equivalent in structure or meaning, but there are some similarities in what the animal symbolizes in both languages. In the English idiom *dead cat bounce* and the Croatian *objesiti mačku o rep*, the animal is associated with the concepts of uselessness or pointlessness. In *bell the cat* and *znatiželja je ubila mačku*, the concepts of risk and danger are represented by the feline creature. The animal stands for power in the idioms *be a fat cat* and *kad mačke nema, miševi kolo vode*. It also stands for wealth in the former idiom and authority in the latter idiom. In the English language, a cat can also metaphorically represent excellence (*be the cat's whiskers*), agitation (*like a cat on a hot tin roof*), as well as chaos and disorder (*like herding cats; put the cat among the pigeons*). It can also symbolize the intensity or extremeness of a situation (*raining cats and dogs*) mysteriousness (*smile like a Cheshire cat*), as well as a problem or goal that can be achieved in various ways (*there's more than one way to skin a cat*). In the Croatian language, the animal is associated with wisdom and experience (*stari mačak*), caution and hesitance (*kao mačak oko vruće kaše*), and finally, physical weakness (*vući se kao krepana mačka*).

The lexeme *cat/mačka* behaves similarly in English and Croatian as the lexeme denoting the animal is used to describe humans based on some qualities or behaviour they share. For

example, the English idioms *be a fat cat*, *be the cat's whiskers*, *like a cat on a hot tin roof*, *smile like a Cheshire cat*, and the Croatian idioms *kao mačak oko vruće kaše*, *stari mačak*, *vući se kao krepana mačka*, and *znatiželja je ubila mačku* are all applied to describe humans. The idioms *bell the cat*, *dead cat bounce*, *put the cat among the pigeons*, *raining cats and dogs*, *there is more than one way to skin a cat*, *objesiti mačku o rep*, and *kad mačke nema, miševi kolo vode* are used to describe various situations rather than humans, but are also motivated by the animal's behaviour or have historical origins. What has also been noticed is that in both English and Croatian, the negative or neutral connotation of the lexeme is more dominant than the positive one.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the fact that one word can take many meanings and represent different things, as well as work together with its surrounding elements to give rise to interpretations that are not literal is a fascinating property of a language. While literal language used in most of everyday exchanges of words is important for basic communication and understanding, figurative language is a means of expressing creativity and a unique nature of each language, whether it is used to embellish certain literary works or as a part of person-to-person communication.

This thesis dealt with the lexeme *cat/mačka* in various expressions in the English and Croatian language which helped understand how this particular lexeme is used in both of these languages. After the conducted analysis, it can be said that the hypothesis stated at the beginning of the paper was proven right, despite the difference in the number of multi-word expressions extracted from the English and Croatian corpus, i.e. the number of English expressions containing *cat* being higher than that of Croatian expressions. The analysis has showed that in both languages the lexeme has a high metaphorical potential and plays an important role in creating the figurative meaning that the expression carries. Also, it has been established that the lexeme carries several meanings (animal, prostitute, male or female person) and different connotations.

Given the limitations of this study, the analysis could only cover a small number of expressions; however, this study could be further expanded by covering an even larger number of multi-word expressions to investigate whether they are equivalent in both languages and how the lexeme affects or changes their meaning. Another possible direction in the exploration of the use of the lexeme *cat/mačka* is to investigate the differences and similarities in collocations

between the English and Croatian language, and well as the frequency with which the lexeme co-occurs with other words.

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