

Liliana MIHALACHI

A Study on Fifteen Less Known

ENGLISH PHRASES



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*A Study on Fifteen Less
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*With their Etym(yth)ologies and
Possible Translations into Romanian*

Lumen

Iași,
2010

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AND POSSIBLE TRANSLATIONS INTO
ROMANIAN

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**Pagin 1 sat
goal inten ionat**

Reference

This is a vivid word story.

In an age when varieties of English refer to e-mailed, texted, blogged and twittered English, this study takes a refreshing look at the etymological and etymythological biographies of some fifteen English phrases.

Starting from square one, the study traces the journeys of these phrases into our daily English(es) telling stories that are, at times, at variance with each other: due to usage, to happenstance, or to abuse. On its way, the study dots the methodological I's and crosses the historiographic T's whilst providing an alert socio-political contextualisation to each phrase. Willing to go the full nine yards, the study engages in attentive evaluation even when the competing etymythologies only add up to ambiguous etymologies. It is in these instances that the keen researcher makes way

for the story-teller of socio-linguistic word biographies.

In the fullness of time, this study deserves to be extended into a comparative idiomatic dictionary – as the ingenious translation that flexes the Romanian linguistic potential seems to indicate.

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*TO MY FAMILY, FOR THEIR
UNCONDITIONAL LOVE
AND SUPPORT*

*FAMILIEI MELE, PENTRU
IUBIREA ȘI SPRIJINUL LOR
NECONDIȚIONAT*

Extras din volumul: Mihalachi, L. (2010).

A study on fifteen less known english phrases.

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and offering me all the possible support and appreciation through the editorial route.

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Last but not least, to all those who will attempt to read this book, please forgive the shortcomings of such an endeavour and enjoy it as much as possible.

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I. Introduction

I.1. Pleading in favour of a history of words and not only

It is already commonplace to say that we live in a word-world; it's too obvious not to emphasize the fact that we actually live in a word wide web, where contexts and linkers, word stories and grammar rules, and verisimilitude and virtuality are just like the components of an individual's personality.

Good translators know enough of each of these components and more often than not they activate pieces of information that only a keen researcher would bother to deal with. Meeting with texts is meeting with life; there are always prerequisites that must exist in a translator to be able to make out more than common people make out of a text. And there is always something new to experience.

Working with corpora is a job that I have always considered to be part of a translator's work. Even their spare time may sometimes allow for busman's holidays spent jotting down words, phrases heard or overheard on the radio, on TV, in conversations with native speakers of different foreign languages, etc.

Long lists of words and expressions, classified according to various criteria, are very important. As crucial as all these long lists are the stories behind words, and in particular old, less known, or awkward stories, peculiar to certain varieties of English. Each word, each expression has its own biography and most of the time discovering this biography helps a lot when it comes to grasping the meaning of a text and then conveying it in another code or language.

It is impossible not to become interested in the stories of words once you have passed beyond the barrier that separates text translation from meaning translation. When you can feel words as carrying a whole world behind them, discovering this world

becomes a matter of velocity of study, not of will or obligation.

As I am not particularly interested now in making a list of phrases, but in focusing on the creativity and ability of changing of individual phrases, I have chosen only fifteen set phrases that I came across in different contexts. I am content with the idea that no one can know the entire vocabulary of a language but can be a good translator from and into that language if he/she has enough experience in deciphering the reality behind the less known or peculiar phrases.

Of course, the easiest way of dealing with these phrases is simply by looking them up in a bilingual dictionary. You may consider yourself lucky if you find them explained in detail. If someone else trod on the same path and found the solution quicker than you, then the impulse of evolution would immediately persuade us into the use-and-go-on-with-this way of dealing with things. But that is what a machine would do. Fortunately, we are always much more involved with things, whether it is about judging the family next door or tracking a dangerous virus.

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