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### World of Animals in An Intercultural Perspective (Slavic vs. Germanic Metaphors)

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#### 1. **Introduction**

In a cross-cultural macro perspective the distinction between the East and the West is mostly understood as the distinction between the Oriental and the Occidental cultural tradition. Since the beginning of the last decade, there has been a veritable explosion of studies covering the history of communication and of language research which strive toward systems and universals of language features. They were most likely brought on by increased contact between the North Americans on one side and the nations of the Pacific Rim on the other. The cultural differences between these broadly defined groups can be seen as maximally different cultural systems (Hoffer 1986:43). The cross-cultural differences between East and West, however, could be apparent on a much more detailed scale of latitude, i.e. between the cultural systems belonging to rather close communities, both in the geographic as well as the cultural sense. It has been noted that if the two cultures involved are similar, but not exactly the same and if their members have some knowledge of each other, the degree of "tolerance" is apt to be much less than in the case of two greatly different cultures (Kurokawa 1992:132). Such differences stemming in even the slightest variations of concepts or attitudes cause a series of misinterpretations leading to communicational difficulties and always a merciless verdict of the norm violation.

This paper is based on data originating in the languages of two communities – a Germanic, represented here by English, and a Slavic, represented by Czech. Both corpora consist of similes, and, to a lesser degree of metaphors. They illustrate one of the most ancient metaphors, HUMAN IS AN ANIMAL, which exploits the human vs. non-human controversy.

Similes, just like many other expressions, reflect the anthropocentric orientation of language, so it is not surprising to find that the majority of them deal with humans. In similes, people are evaluated as to their PHYSICAL, MENTAL and SOCIAL properties and habits. Animals are the most favored objects of comparison (Cermák 1983:476). Every phraseological lexicon contains a great number of instances of the "Human is an Animal" metaphor, thus attesting to its popularity in everyday usage. Apparently, animals have always been on our mind. They are central to the process by which humans form an image of themselves. Levi Strauss (1964, 1966) claimed that animals figure so commonly in discourse not only because "they are good to eat", but because "they are good to think with". We may then argue that the purpose of the animal metaphor is not only classification and the creation of order, but also "forging a system of moral conduct and resolving the problem of man in nature" (Tambiah 1969:457, cf. Tapper 1988:51).

### 2. Data

The Czech corpus contains 996 similes and metaphors, excerpted from the pentilingual (Czech, English, French, German and Russian) lexicon (Cermák *et al.* 1983).

The English corpus contains 1523 items, excerpted again from Cermák *et al.* (1983), as well as from Kunin (1984) and Wilkinson (1993).

Data obtained from dictionaries and lexicons have one property in common. They are created within the historiography of its own academic traditions (St. Clair, 1988:53). They do, however, reflect the linguistic usage of the community (in our case the metaphoric usage) which in its turn provides an insight into the value structures of different traditions.

This study relies on the quantitative aspects of the data. We argue that the proportional relations reveal the relative degree of the productivity of individual metaphoric components, the degree of their salience and, consequently, the degree of their symbolic power.

As far as the function and the logical structure of similes are concerned, we will concur with the classic Aristotelian view that similes and metaphors have a similar purpose in communication. In his Poetics and his Rhetorics, Aristotle expressed the view that metaphors are implicit comparisons. The main logical components of comparisons are referred to as "comparandum", "comparatum" and "tertium comparationis". Richards (1936) proposed an another set of useful terms, namely the "topic", the "vehicle" and the "ground". In our corpus, the topic, appearing on the left side with respect to the comparative conjunctions, always refers to a human. The vehicle, on the right, refers to an animal in the broad sense of the word, since the similes feature all kinds of non-humans, such as fish, birds, insects and even mythological and extinct creatures. The ground, or the tertium comparationis, expresses the nature of the relationship of the other two components,

pointing out the feature in which their similarity has been defined by the speaker. Thus in **Daniel is as strong as a lion**, **Daniel** is the topic (comparandum), a **lion** is the vehicle (comparatum) and **strong** is a ground (tertium comparationis).

### 3. The Linguistic Fauna of Similes

The following Fig. 1. introduces the entire fauna of similes in both, English and Czech, corpora. On the abscissa, we see the animals appearing in the topics of similes, arranged on the scale of proximation to a human being in terms of social as well as physical space. We practice such discrimination almost daily in our adult lives- sorting people into those that are "like us", and others that we consider "not like us". So, for instance, we set off "the members of the immediate family", "distant relatives", etc. These distinctions may be treated as analogies in the world of animals. We categorize some as "pets", virtually family members, who live inside "the house" and the others "farm animals" who live outside the house on "the farm", etc. (Tapper 1988:50). On the ordinate, the proportional relations of the individual groups of animals are stated in terms of the percentage of their occurrence in the similes for each language corpus.

In further discussion, we will limit our attention to two groups: the FARM ANIMALS and the WILD BIRDS. The choice of these two groups was influenced by two factors:

First, their potential to figure as two extremities in the world of symbols; the Farm Animal representing the Static and the Bounded versus the Wild Bird representing the Dynamic and the Free.

Second, their disproportional occurrence; the English corpus favors the wild birds (19.0 % vs. Czech 8.8 %), whereas the Czech corpus favors the farm animals (25.6 % vs. English 14.6%).

Both the farm animals and the wild birds will be further observed as vehicles modeling human physical, mental and social properties.

### 4. Physical Properties

### 4.1. Farm Animals

There are numerous points of similarity between humans and farm animals that concern body parts, body shapes and surface, general look, hygiene, strength, dexterity, energy and health, motion, vocality, consumption, etc.

In the case of cattle, horses, sheep and goats, the similes tell us nothing surprising about either humankind or the animals: they are strong and noisy and seem to alternate between apathetic staring and tedious work.

The COW is a symbol of laziness and indifference in both languages, e.g. Cz: lezet rozvaleny jako kráva (to lie lounging like a cow); E: sit there like an expectant cow, etc.

The Bull, in Czech merely strong and noisy, is endowed by extreme physical manifestations of savagery in English. He locomotes in a pointless bout of violence, as in **trash around like a short-tailed bull in a fly time**, and he is awkward, e.g. **like a bull in a china shop.** 

The Sheep of the Czech corpus differs in its physical attributes from its English mate. Unlike the other animals who are strong and healthy in both corpora, the Czech sheep is scabby, dizzy and sick, e.g. **chrchlat/ kaslat jako ovce** (rattle/cough like a sheep), etc.

The Goat is a symbol of lechery in both languages. The Czech metaphor **stary kozel** (an old goat) identifies an older man with a sexual appetite exceeding the norm appropriate for his age. In English the sexual connotation is also attributed to the Ram, e.g. **be rank/ragged/fierce**, or **be a stray tup on the loose**, etc. The female goat, on the other hand, is associated in Czech with a sexually unattractive haggard woman. This association is carried in English by the female horse, identified by the lexemes **Harridan** and **Jade**.

Predictably, the Horse carries features of either a strong and vivacious animal or a worn out and exploited laborer in both languages, e.g. Cz: **zkouset jako kun** (suffer like a horse); E: **works like a horse in a mill**, etc.

All young animals, and also those in Czech referred to by a diminutive, are endowed with physical features characteristic of children. They are energetic, frisky, they frolic and sometimes stagger. In this case, there is no noticeable difference between both corpora and the evaluative connotation is positive.

The Pig is one animal that seems to carry a load of abuse in both languages. In the similes where a human is compared to a pig we find tertia comparationis expressing disgust. Highly unflattering is the comparison of the sound manifestation of people and pigs, such as, Cz: mlaskat (smack), funet (snuffle), E: squeal, wheeze, as well as of their facial expression, Cz: tvárit se jako prase po první rane (look like a pig after the first blow), E: prick up her ears like an old sow in beans. etc. In some cases, the Czech corpus is more expressive than the English one. In the similes dealing with excessive alcohol consumption, we find stylistically unmarked tertium comparationis drunk as in drunk like a pig, whereas the Czech corpus contains a set of vulgarisms, such as vozralej, namazat se, vozrat se (loaded/ to get drunk).

Another difference between the corpora is in the amount of attention to the domain of "hygiene and grooming" associated with the porcine family. The Czech corpus contains more detailed description, e.g. spinavy (dirty), **neupraveny** (slovenly), **zpoceny/potit se** (sweaty/sweat), **smrdet** (stink) **tece z nej** (sweat pours out of him), etc.

The feeling of superiority over the "animal relatives" with regard to cleanliness, could be observed systematically throughout the Czech corpus, in which those people who do not satisfy the local hygienic norm are compared to practically any animal.

### 4.2. The Wild Birds

Unlike in the sets with farm animals, the vehicles represented by wild birds are much more frequent in the English corpus than they are in the Czech set (see graph 1).

The quantitative prominence of birds in the English corpus is also reflected in the wider variety of species as well as in the richer symbolic spectrum which the wild birds are found to cover.

Besides the generic terms in both languages, such as Bird and Nestling, the English similes refer to seventy two species of birds compared to the Czech corpus with twenty eight species. The most quoted birds in English are the lark (29 similes) and the owl (24). Czech favorite birds are the sparrow (9 similes) and the hobby (6)

For obvious reasons, the wild birds are less suitable models for human physique than the farm animals. This fact is reflected in the relatively small number of similes with this function. The bodies of the people compared to wild birds are mostly small and emaciated, e.g. Cz: byt jako vrabec (to be like a sparrow); E: be lean as a whitterick (curlew). The English adds another dimensions, "long" for the

sparrow, jackdaw, heron and butterbump, and "fat/ plum" for the partridge and several seabirds.

The bird-like body parts mentioned in the similes are also few, with the exception of sharp-featured faces and the eyes, alert and bright, as in. Cz: **mit oci jako jestrab** (have eyes like a hawk); E: **be eagle-eyed**, etc. In English, however, there are many birds whose long and thin legs serve as an unflattering comparison with human limbs, specifically those of the heron, the loon, the bittern, the crow, the kite, the sparrow and the lark.

To be compared to a bird from the point of view of health and energy is generally a compliment, e.g. Cz: cily jako koroptvicka (nimble like a little quail); E: be chippy/pert/brisk as a canary/ jay/ lark/ sparrow/ magpie, etc. The English birds can be also sick (the parrot and the seabird) as well as exhausted and inactive, e.g. be worn-out like a woodpecker in a petrified forest; be like an owl in an ivy bush, etc.

English birds are also evaluated as to their general appearance, e.g. **be bold** like a coot; naked like a jay; wet like a robin/kite, and with admiration, e.g. be smart like a lark/robin; be dapper like a sandpiper/ cockren, etc.

In the realm of farm animals, the Czech and English corpora were not significantly domains.

In the realm of the wild birds, however, we feel that the corpora show a significant difference in the very concept of the Wild Bird.

To a Czech speaker, the birds are far away. Their little bodies are undernourished, e.g. **ji jako vrabec** (eat like a sparrow), and not interesting enough to be further commented upon. The features of their faces are not recognizable. Only the members of the owl family take a humanlike expression, but its is blank and distant. Their voices, however, are sweet, e.g. **mít hlas jako skrivánek** ( to have a voice like a lark) is the most complimentary comparison. In any case, the birds are barely audible and therefore undisturbing. The distance between them and the humans is too great.

The English notion of the Wild Bird is more elaborate. Bodies of the birds come in different shapes – just like the ones of people – and, all things considered, they do not cut a bad figure. The people compared to them move quickly, e.g. run like a skitty (corncrake); be swift as a swallow, etc. Some birds, for instance the sparrow and the lapwing, eat a little, but others are voracious, e.g. have stomachs like kestrel-kites (hawk); be thruff-gutted like a herringsue, etc. With few exceptions, such as in sing like a nightingale, the sounds they produce are not pleasant. To the English speaker, the birds sound hoarse, they cackle, chatter, shreik, squall and roar, e.g. roar like a bittern at a seg-root (sedge-root), etc. Their faces are apparently clearly visible, e.g. stare like a throttled isaac; blink like an air-up hoolet; look haggard like a snipe, etc.

The quantity and array of tertia comparationis assigned to birds by English folklore are a sign of a much closer point of observation than the one apparent from

the Czech data. Even more, the birds are too close for comfort - they are unclean and they smell, e.g. **be lousy/scabbed/dirty like a cuckoo**, etc.

### 5. Mental and Social Characteristics

### 5.1. Farm Animals

The mental properties referred to in the similes involve relatively few domains, such as "character", "emotion" and "intellect". The social properties involve "social position", and "social contacts", including positively evaluated "adherence/attachment" as well as the negative feature "aggression".

Mental and social characteristics are not always easy to distinguish, since they are often in a mutually causative relationship. We will, therefore, deal with them in one section.

Animals, or rather the cultural construction of them, are in this sense used in two contradictory ways. Sometimes they are idealized, as for instance the Lamb who is in many cultures the model of what is considered the positive side of human nature. It carries attributes such as **meek**, **quiet**, **patient**, **peaceful**, **pious**, **tame**, **innocent** and **obedient**. By contrast, animals are also represented as the Other, the Beast, the model of disorder or the way as things should not be done (Tapper 1988:50-51) - a point we have already observed in the physical domain. In the world of similes, the assessment of human nature is polarized. People are either bad or good. The presence of animals in the comparatum triggers a mostly negative evaluation. In our mind, those properties which distinguish us from animals lift us above them, into the realms of morality and civilization. Those features which we identify as animal-like are mostly considered degrading.

The corpora differ not only in the assignment of the expressive evaluation, but also in the assignment of particular mental and social features.

We will now observe the similarities and differences between the English and the Czech by setting up features that reflect the explicit as well as the implicit tertia comparationis.

Tab. 1 lists the features which are shared by both corpora. Some features are polarized, i.e. expressing both extremes, such as HATEFUL vs. AFFECTIONATE, or LAZY vs. HARD WORKING. In other instances, the features express one extreme only, e.g. LECHEROUS, STUPID, etc.

# Table 1 MENTAL AND SOCIAL FEATURES FARM ANIMALS FEATURES COMMON TO BOTH LANGUAGES

<u>NEGATIVE</u> <u>POSITIVE</u>

HATEFUL / MEAN vs. AFFECTIONATE/ HAPPY
SAVAGE vs. GENTLE/ GOOD
OBSTINATE vs. OBEDIENT
LAZY vs. HARD WORKING

PASSIVE/ INDIFFERENT LECHEROUS STUPID

LUCKY/ ENVIABLE (soc.)

Our perception of farm animals is ambivalent. If "good", they are hard working and meek, if "bad", they are lazy and mean. However, the consensus is reached when it comes to their intellectual capacity - they are perceived as stupid, ignorant, and dependent on the protection of their masters. The most contemptible and vulgar is the person who behaves like any member of the porcine family. The swine, besides being lazy, is considered greedy, mean, ignorant and indulgent, e.g. Cz: **chovat se jako svine** (behave like a swine); E: **be lobber headed as a sow**; Cz: **zít jako prase v zite** (live like a pig in the rye); E: be happy as a sow in shit, etc. In Czech, there is an example which displays a certain degree of empathy, quite amicably noting that even the lowly pig needs human kindness and attention, as in **potrebovat neco jak prase drbani** (to need something as a pig needs scratching, i.e. need something a lot).

The image of savagery is attributed to the proverbial Bull, who is characterized in Czech as **rozzureny** (furious), in English also **sulky**, **fell** (savage) .

A particular attention is being paid to the features OBSTINATE/OBEDIENT, which can be understood as two extremes on the scale of dependency on their masters. It is mostly the "independent", i.e. OBSTINATE feature which carries strong negative connotation. People with the potential of having their own mind are compared to the pig, the mule, the horse, and the ram

The features evaluated as positive are typically assigned to the young animals as well as to the horse whose character is, especially in English, quite elaborated on. In the English corpus we find allusions to mental and social characteristics, such "practical", "proud", "bold", "tough", "fine", e.g. **be fine as a horse**, etc. (see tab.2).

Table 2. Lists the features in which the languages differ The features are illustrated with examples of similes.

## Table 2 MENTAL AND SOCIAL FEATURES FARM ANIMALS

FEATURES TYPICAL TO BOTH LANGUAGES

NEGATIVE POSITIVE

#### A) CZECH ONLY

TACITURN e g. **mlcet jako beran** (be silent like a ram)
POOR (soc.) e.g. **byt bohata jako koza rohatá** (be rich like
a she-goat with horns)

### B) ENGLISH ONLY

INEFFECTUAL vs. PRACTICAL e.g be like a bull calf in a e.g have a horse-sense

peat-moor dickey (ditch)

IMPUDENT vs. POLITE

e.g. be corrat as the crocker's e.g. bow and scrape like a mare (seller of saffron) bull at the bank

USELESS (soc.) vs. PROMINENT (soc.) e.g. be like a pig, he'll do no e.g. be the bull of the woods

good alive

IGNORANT e g. be subtle as a dead pig

FOOLISH e.g. play a goat

MISERABLE e.g. be miserable as a pig in pattens

SOLEMN e.g. be solemn as a cow

PROUD e.g. be proud as a horse in bells

Table 2. contains several features pointing towards some cultural specifics, referring again to the differences in attitude.

In the Czech corpus, the most negatively evaluated animal is the Sheep. She is considered utterly despicable, e.g. vyhybat se nekomu jak prasive ovci (to avoid somebody like a scabby sheep). She is further associated with attributes such as "stupid", "confused", "indolent", whereas in English it can be, besides a mildly negative Gimmer (a gossipy woman), also flatteringly associated with an image of a pleasant young woman, e.g. Wedder. Some farm animals are TACITURN, i.e. almost always silent, non-communicative, and, consequently, unapproachable on human terms. Indeed, there is a very little else what is stated concerning their mental and social profile, considering that the connection between bohata (rich) and koza rohata (she-goat with horns) was most likely made due to the rhyme.

The English set of features reveal much keener interest in this particular side of the animal/ human nature. In contrast to the Czech TACITURN, the English farm animals are seen as SOLEMN, i.e. serious and silent, but not unapproachable. Occasionally they are endowed with some other qualities with which the people can be identified and even admired for, such as the social connotations assigned to the bull, to bow and scrape like a bull at the bank; to be a bull of the woods (boss, foreman), old bull (an experienced man), etc.

### 5.2. Wild Birds

Table 3. contains the list of features characterizing the grounds for comparison between wild birds and people common to both corpora.

### Table 3 MENTAL AND SOCIAL FEATURES WILD BIRDS

### FEATURES COMMON TO BOTH LANGUAGES

<u>NEGATIVE</u>		POSITIVE
MEAN/ ANGRY	vs.	<b>AFFECTIONATE</b>
COWARDLY	vs.	DARING/FREE
FEEBLE MINDED	vs.	BRIGHT/ SHARP
INEFFECTUAL	vs.	WATCHFUL

GLOOMY FOOLISH AGGRESSIVE (soc.) INTRUSIVE (soc.) INQUISITIVE (soc.)

Both corpora characterize the people who are compared to wild birds as unstable, moody, but also charming. In contrast to the apathetic farm animals, they can be annoyingly intrusive and inquisitive. If "bad", then they are pictured as mean and cowardly. If "good", they are affectionate, bright and freedom loving, or less complimentarily, "difficult to tie down". People with this mentality are often characterized by another bird-related expression, E. flighty and Cz. preletavy (from let (flight)). The next table lists the features expressed exclusively in the English corpus of similes . The Czech corpus does not reveal any specific traits.

### Table 4 MENTAL AND SOCIAL FEATURES WILD BIRDS

### FEATURES SPECIFIC FOR ONE LANGUAGE ONLY

NEGATIVE A) CZECH ONLY None		POSITIVE
B) ENGLISH ONLY MALICIOUS e.g. be a stormy petrel (revelling in trouble)	vs.	GENTLE/ TIMID e.g. <b>be a buzzard</b>
NARROW MINDED e.g. be snipe-nosed	vs.	NOBLE e.g. <b>be gentle as a falcon</b> (i.e. an excelle

breed)

LAZY	e.g.	be lazy as a gowk (cuckoo)
INSANE	e.g.	be mad as a curlew
SECRETIVE	e.g.	be mum as an owl
GREEDY	e.g.	be a cormorant
VAIN	e.g.	be a popinjay (parrot)
VICTIMIZED (soc.)	e.g.	be a spring partridge
HOMOSEXUAL (soc.)	e.g.	be queer as a coot
POOR (soc.)	e.g.	be poor as a coot
CHEERFUL	e.g.	be gay as a goldfinch

The presence of additional features could be interpreted as the higher degree of identification of the English speakers with the birds than that of the Czech speakers. The mental and social features, just like in the previous sets, are mostly negative, elaborating on the theme of "weakness", both in the moral as well as the intellectual sense. Many birds are considered insane (the coot, the cuckoo, the curlew and the loon). Even though a few birds are admired (the falcon and the eagle), most of them are considered outcasts (the nestlings, the cuckoo, the coot, the crow, the jay, the kestrel, the lapwing, the robin, the mudlark, and the owl.)

### 6. Conclusions

Culture has been defined as the axiomatic beliefs that are never questioned much less tacitly acknowledged (Mehan and Wood 1975:9, cf St. Clair 1991:134). Many of the beliefs have been encoded into language and it is the purpose of the studies dealing with metaphors to make their acknowledgement possible. There has been a great demand for this kind of knowledge. The metaphors are useful not only as clues to our own culture, but they are also keys to the mysteries of "the rites of passage" (St. Clair 1991:132) from one social reality to another, performed by those who cross the geographic and cultural boundaries between communities.

This particular study concentrates on a small fragment of the "human is an animal" metaphor expressed in Czech and English similes. Using the quantitative analysis as well as the content analysis, we have been viewing the Czech and English speakers through their own bifocals aiming at non-humans and through them at themselves as well. Even though both communities stem in and their cultures are derived from common European background, the Czech and English have constructed worlds of animals that do not correspond.

There is no doubt that one of the underlying sources of differences must be sought in the differences of ecological nature, i.e. the habitat. The long agricultural tradition of the Czech community certainly determines more intimate knowledge of the farm animals, whereas members of the English culture, traditionally hunters and

seafarers, take a primary interest in the genera and species inhabiting their own specific environment.

The quantitative disproportions apparent from the corpora are accompanied by the differences in symbolic values and expressive powers of the individual animals and birds For a Czech, both groups of non-humans are used mostly as the models of physical aspects of humanity. Since the birds are in this respect less suitable models, the attention paid to them is minimal.

For an English speaker, the use of farm animals and wild birds in similes is reserved mainly as a background for the observation of human nature in terms of its mental and social aspects. Especially the birds appear to be true symbols of human spirit, be it the noble one, or the lowly and the mean.

The interaction between the symbolic meanings and the elements of the conceptual nature of linguistic items deserves its place in the theory of translation and in translation itself (Rakusan 1996).). After all, who would have thought that, as symbols of an "underprivileged" and "unclean", the Czech sheep and the English cuckoo-bird can be paired as translational equivalents.

The semantic framework drawn from the data can be identified in many aspects of life. For instance, it reveals itself in dreams (Van de Castle 1994), it reappears in different forms of folklore, and also underlies many aspects of the popular culture, including the cultural differences in the actual behavior towards animals. In this respect, let us remind ourselves of the leisure activities popular in cultures derived from the Anglo-Saxon cultural mores, e.g. bird watching, organization of Wild Bird Centers, Birders World Nature Stores and others, almost non-existent within the Czech cultural context. Alfred Hitchcock's famous film "The Birds" is actually an another form of expression- and a very poignant one Occasionally, the conclusions we draw from linguistic research may turn out to be disappointing. We are inclined to believe in the universal values of humanity and in the necessity of communication, which in their turn ensure the peaceful coexistence among members of different communities. The language research, however, reveals additional unexpected barriers between the enclaves of different cultures, built of prejudices and rigid stereotypes. The reason may be that language, the main instrument of thinking, stems from the Dark Ages (already pointed out by A. Korzybski: 1933 and S. I. Hayakawa: 1964). Even though it exercises the power to impose its structures on the modern experience, language is not sufficiently equipped to deal with many of its aspects.

Such problems turn the attention of linguists to new research leading towards the discovery and exposition of old but still alive patterns. Only then an enlightened cross-cultural communication can win over animosity and estrangement.

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