

# Analysis of Horse Idioms in the English and Croatian Language

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Štebih, Laura

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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Laura Štebih

**ANALYSIS OF HORSE IDIOMS IN THE ENGLISH AND CROATIAN  
LANGUAGE**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the B.A. in English Language and  
Literature and Italian Language and Literature at the University of Rijeka

Supervisor:

Doc. dr. sc. Anita Memišević

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## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses on horse idioms featured in the English and Croatian language. It starts off with an introduction that deals with idioms in general, their usage and types. Subsequently, there is an overview of cultural influence that the horse has had on humanity and its development. In the past, it served not only as an indicator of wealth and social status, but also a symbol of fertility. When it comes to horse idioms, there is an abundance of them in the English language. They originate from history, horse racing and typical horse characteristics. The Croatian language has two times fewer idioms and some of them are translated versions of the English ones, while others might be originally Croatian. The analysis of idioms in each language is divided into four sections: horse as the idiom component in both languages, horse as the component in one language and another animal in the other, horse as the component in one language and idioms that do not contain an animal in the other and horse as the component in one language with no idiom equivalent in the other.

**Keywords:** analysis, cultural influence, horse idioms

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and present horse idioms that exist in the English and the Croatian language. With that in mind, it seems only right to start off with the historical background of the idioms and their definition.

The term *phraseologia* was introduced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, while the English term *phraseology* was first recorded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> However, phraseology is a relatively young discipline and first progress in exploring idioms was made in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more precisely around the 1980s and the 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

Idiom is “*a group of words which have a different meaning when used together from the one it would have if the meaning of each word were taken individually*”<sup>3</sup>. The main characteristics of an idiom are its fixed structure, stability of use and integrality. They can function either as a part of a sentence or as an individual entity. There are three types of idioms: a phonetic word that consists of one autosemantic word and a maximum of two synsemantic words (*on the horse*), word set consisting of a minimum of two autosemantic words (*as healthy as a horse*) and idiom-sentence (*don't look a gift horse in the mouth*). When it comes to the origins of idioms, they can sometimes be biblical (*war horse*) or mythological (*Trojan horse*) and there are some that originate from literature (*my kingdom for a horse*) and some that are derived from sports (*back the wrong horse*).<sup>4</sup>

Idioms are often metaphorical and if one does not know their meaning, they will misinterpret the sentence and find it confusing or irrelevant.<sup>5</sup> Some of them are easy to

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<sup>1</sup> Vidović Bolt, 2011, p. 13, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>2</sup> Kavka and Zybert, 2004, p. 54

<sup>3</sup> *Collins Cobuild dictionary of idioms*, 1995, p. iv

<sup>4</sup> Vrgoč and Fink Arsovski, 2008, p. 6, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>5</sup> *Collins Cobuild dictionary of idioms*, 1995, p. iv

understand even if the person has never heard of them (*as strong as a horse*) while some are strange and their origin is unknown (*see a man about a horse* or *horse and rabbit stew*).

Even though idioms are known for their fixed structure, there are many instances of idioms with alternative forms such as *back the wrong horse* that can also be found as *bet on the wrong horse* or *potkivati lipsala konja* that can be used instead of *šibati lipsala konja*. These examples showcase that different verbs can be used for the same idiom and that the meaning of the idiom will stay the same.<sup>6</sup>

According to the Collins Cobuild dictionary of idioms, idiomatic expressions are mostly used in conversation, i.e. informal language, but they can also be found in journalism when a writer wants to make his story more interesting and eye-catching. Idioms have also found their use in politics for expressing opinions as quickly as possible, even though such use is disapproved of because it suggests a lack of originality.<sup>7</sup>

One of the interesting features of idioms is that there is a difference between British English, American English and Australian English. Nowadays, the determination of the origins of a certain idiom has become tricky due to the American influence, i.e. music and films.<sup>8</sup>

When it comes to the phraseology in the Croatian language, it was greatly influenced by the Soviet linguist Viktor Vladimirovič Vinogradov. Inspired by his work, in 1970 Antica Menac published the article *O strukturi frazeologizama* that marked the beginning of phraseology in Croatia.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Collins Cobuild dictionary of idioms, 1995, p. v

<sup>7</sup> Ivi, p.vi

<sup>8</sup> Ivi, p. vii

<sup>9</sup> Vidović Bolt, 2011, p. 15, trans. L. Štebih

This thesis contains analysis of both English and Croatian idioms that were conditioned by the mutual life of horses and humans, resulting in a vocabulary that is filled with horse expressions.

Even though proverbs can be seen as one of the types of idioms, they are not featured here because their structure is somewhat different.

## 2. Horse influence

So why is it that there are so many idioms featuring horse as the main component?

Horses have been a part of the human life since antiquity, paving the way for the first civilisations and helping people in conquering new territories. The real indicator of their importance is the fact that some horses have become famous throughout history, like Bucephalus (the horse of Alexander the Great), Marengo (Napoleon's horse) or even Caligula's horse Incinatus.

People were dependent on horses because they were used as working animals for pulling carriages, wagons and ploughs and were used as workforce to power a variety of machines that performed crucial jobs of grinding corn, draining mines and raising minerals and water. Horses were also used as means of transportation, enabling people to travel to their desired destination, and for delivering news and mail.<sup>10</sup>

However, the significance of horses was not connected only to work and riding but they were also seen as symbols of social status, power, fertility etc. For example, Henry VIII labelled Anne of Cleves, his fourth wife, as 'a great Flanders mare', alluding to her ability to bear children, commenting on her appearance and maybe even accentuating her calm nature. Through this comment, Henry demonstrated his desire for a successor and his opinion about women. However, this statement was not a mere comment, but also a reflection of his passion for horses and horse breeding. He imported horses in order to develop new breeds of horses and to improve the strength and stamina of the draught horses used in England. Behind his words lie: "*The possibility of dynastic endurance, expansionist and protective foreign policy*

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<sup>10</sup> Edwards *et al*, 2011, p. 4



*and a saturation in horse-knowledge...*<sup>11</sup> According to Peter Edwards and Elspeth Graham “*Flemish mares are not just analogous to potentially fertile women; the discourses of nation, marriage, gender and horse management are far more deeply intertwined.*”<sup>12</sup>

Horses were indicators of social status. There was a clear line between the people who possessed a horse and those who did not. Even if a person did have enough money to buy and own a horse, the owner would be judged depending on the type of horse he had (a draught horse or a riding horse), how the horse was decorated, ridden etc. However, owning a horse, whose price was believed to be over the limit that one could afford, “...*could lead to condemnation for social over-reaching...*”<sup>13</sup> Amongst the elite, a horse was not seen as a necessity, but as a fundamental symbol of status. They had the biggest and the most well equipped stables that served for demonstrating their wealth to the public eye. Even though the elite were driven by money and power, they were breeders and are responsible for the improvement of certain qualities in horses.<sup>14</sup>

There is another case in which the upper classes wished to affirm their social status: war. According to Edwards and Graham, serving in the army, as a member of heavy cavalry, was seen as justification of “...*their right to exercise authority over the population as a whole.*” However, with the development of weapons, heavy cavalry was replaced with light horsemen so the elite had to find new ways of displaying their wealth. Eventually, the horse became “...*a fashionable accessory for ‘sport, luxury and social display’.*”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Edwards *et al*, 2011, pp. 4-5

<sup>12</sup> *Ivi*, p. 5

<sup>13</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 5-6

<sup>14</sup> *Ivi*, p. 7

<sup>15</sup> *Ivi*, p. 8

Unfortunately, the drift between horses and humans happened around 1930's, as a consequence of the industrial revolution and the ongoing development of technology, especially after World War II.<sup>16</sup>

At some point in the past, horses started being seen as intelligent creatures and were attributed some human characteristics such as loyalty, courage, nobility of mind and faithfulness. The death of a horse affected its owner as much as the death of his friend would.<sup>17</sup>

Nowadays, people are not accustomed to seeing horses on the streets. Upon catching sight of one, there is always an initial surprise and an inevitable exclamation: 'A horse!' especially among children. Horses do not really have an important role in people's lives anymore. It all boiled down to leisure and sports that are not as popular as some others (except for horse racing in America) and are reserved for the rich.

Regardless of that, our language is so rich in expressions originating from riding, selling and handling horses that they even go unnoticed.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Edwards *et al*, 2011, p. 1

<sup>17</sup> *Ivi*, p. 25

<sup>18</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 1-2

### 3. Analysis of horse idioms in the English language

Throughout the history, horses were of huge importance to people. They were used for transport, war, food and as working animals. The significance of a horse was so big that it even found its place in Greek mythology and the Bible. It is no wonder that nowadays there are so many horse idioms in every language. Through these idioms, the meaning of the horse and its major characteristics can be pinpointed and analysed. Different cultures and different periods had their own views on horses and their use and as the use of horses was changing, the language was changing accordingly.

This analysis will cover a wide variety of horse idioms that exist in the English language and their equivalents in the Croatian language and vice versa, that are used in communication and featured in dictionaries.

#### 3.1 Horse as the idiom component in both the English and Croatian language

<b>IDIOM</b>	<b>CROATIAN EQUIVALENT</b>
back the wrong horse	kladiti se na krivog konja
a dark horse	1. crni konj 2. prava nepoznanica
flog a dead horse	sedlati mrtvog konja potkivati/šibati lipsala konja od tog brašna nema pogače mlatiti praznu slamu derati istu kozu
a one-horse race	trka jednog konja
(don't) change horses in midstream	mijenjati konja usred trke
Trojan horse	trojanski konj
don't look a gift horse in the mouth	poklonjenom konju se ne gleda u zube
horse pill	konjska tableta
work like a horse	raditi kao konj/pas
get back on the horse (that bucked you)	vratiti se na konja

Out of all the idioms featured in this analysis, there are only ten that have horse as a component in both languages and they are all almost literal translations of the English idioms.

Half of these idioms have their origin in horse racing, meaning that they are probably taken from the English language and translated into Croatian since horse racing was never as popular in Croatia as it is in America or England. In Croatia horses were used as working animals and, as of recently, for recreational purposes.

*Back the wrong horse*, or sometimes used as *bet on the wrong horse*, has its origins in the 1600s and it is used for the misjudgement of situations of uncertain outcome such as an election.<sup>19</sup> It seems that the Croatian equivalent *kladiti se na krivog konja* was literally translated from the English language, suggesting that the idiom became popular in the Croatian language after the English language and its idioms became widespread in the early stages of globalisation.

*A dark horse* is an expression that was originally used for a previously unknown horse that unexpectedly won the race. It was used for the first time in Benjamin Disraeli's novel from 1831 and since then it has found its use in politics, more precisely, for the unknown but successful candidate. In the Croatian language, *crni konj* is used not only in politics, but also in sports and any other instance referring to the underdog whose skills are not yet revealed. According to Hrnjak, there are some instances of the usage of *tamni konj*, instead of *crni konj*. Both versions convey the meaning of secrecy and obscurity, but *tamni konj* is a closer equivalent to a *dark horse* even though it is used less frequently.<sup>20</sup>

*Flog a dead horse* or *beat a dead horse* was introduced in the 1600s and used for something without current value. Nowadays, it is used for trying to revive interest in a

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<sup>19</sup> Ammer, 1997, pp. 64-5

<sup>20</sup> Hrnjak, 2010, p. 127, trans. L. Štebih

hopeless matter.<sup>21</sup> In the Croatian language, the closest idiom equivalents are *sedlati mrtvog konja* and *šibati* or *potkivati lipsala konja*, but there are a few more idioms that convey the same meaning of a fruitless endeavour, such as *od tog brašna nema pogače*, *mlatiti praznu slamu*, *derati istu kozu*, *boriti se s vjetrenjačama*, *lajati na mjesec* and *voditi izgublenu bitku*.

A *one-horse race* is used for a contest in which it is obvious that one person or a team has a better chance of winning.<sup>22</sup> The Croatian equivalent is *trka jednog konja* and, just like in the case of *back the wrong horse*, it seems to be a direct translation of its English counterpart.

*(Don't) change horses in midstream*, also used as *(don't) swap horses in midstream*, is a phrase that became popular in 1864 when Abraham Lincoln used it in his speech after he discovered that the National Union League supported him as a President. It means that it is not wise to change methods or opt for a new leader during a crisis.<sup>23</sup> In some dictionaries the idiom is also featured as *change horses in the middle of the stream*. The Croatian equivalent is *mijenjati konja usred trke*, being an almost exact translation from English, but *midstream* has been changed to *trka* ('race'), since horses are more closely associated with being working animals or used for entertainment purposes.

*Trojan horse* is probably one of the best known idioms that exist. It is an expression used for anything that at first seems harmless, but will probably destroy something important. The expression originates from Greek mythology. The Trojan horse was a wooden horse that the Greeks used to get their soldiers inside the city walls and destroy it.<sup>24</sup> In Croatian it is called *trojanski konj* and conveys the same meaning, as it does in any other language that has this expression.

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<sup>21</sup> Ammer, 1997, p. 78

<sup>22</sup> Collins Cobuild dictionary of idioms, 1995, p. 216

<sup>23</sup> Ammer, 1997, p. 182

<sup>24</sup> Collins Cobuild dictionary of idioms, 1995, pp. 216-7

*Don't look a gift horse in the mouth* is an expression used for being too critical or suspicious of a certain gift. According to The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms, it is a cautionary proverb used for the first time by a 4<sup>th</sup>-century cleric. It has been actively used since the 1500s and alludes to looking at a horse's teeth to determine its age.<sup>25</sup> The popularity of this idiom stems from the fact that horses were commonly used as gifts by rulers as rewards for competitions won, exceptional bravery, combat skills or leadership in war times, or as friendly gestures to ensure strong and stable relationships between rulers. Receiving a horse was seen as an exceptional honour and showing any signs of dissatisfaction about the gift was seen as a grave insult. The Croatian equivalent *poklonjenom konju se ne gleda u zube* is probably a loan because horses were not as widespread among the common people as donkeys were, especially in the southern regions of the country.

*Horse pill* and its equivalent *konjska tableta* are self-explanatory, alluding to a pill so big that it could be given to a horse.

*Work like a horse* and *raditi kao konj* are again very logical as to why they are used in both languages. Horses have always been seen as hard-working animals and that characteristic is attributed to anyone who is diligent and works very hard.

*Get back on the horse* refers to resuming an activity that one experienced difficulty with or has already fallen short of.<sup>26</sup> The origins of the phrase might be from the battles or competitions in which a rider would be taken down, but would successfully get back on his horse and continue with his duty.

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<sup>25</sup> Ammer, 1997, p. 638

<sup>26</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/get+back+on+the+horse>

### 3.2 Horse as the idiom component in the English language and another animal as a component in the Croatian language

IDIOM	CROATIAN EQUIVALENT
put the cart before the horse	praviti/spremati ražanj, a zec u šumi
I could eat a horse!	Mogao bih vola pojesti!
eat like a horse	jesti kao svinja/prase
a willing horse	radišan kao pčela/mrav/krtica
pee like a racehorse	pišati kao krava
as strong as a horse	jak kao bik/hrast/medvjed
as healthy as a horse	zdrav kao riba/dren/bik zdrav-zdravcat

*Put the cart before the horse* is an idiom used when things are being done in the wrong order.<sup>27</sup> It stems from the fact that there is no logic in putting the cart in front of the horse. There needs to be order in everything we do or otherwise the work will not be done properly. Meanwhile, the Croatian equivalent *praviti* or *spremati ražanj, a zec u šumi* ('prepare the spit while the rabbit is still in the woods') might allude to the rabbit's speed. In other words, it is not wise to rush something that depends on the fulfilment of a previously unfinished task, the outcome of which is still unclear, i.e. do not plan on eating a rabbit if you are not sure you will catch it.

If someone says that they *could eat a horse*, it means that they are very hungry.<sup>28</sup> The Croatian equivalent features an ox probably because it is more common to eat beef than it is to eat horse meat. Regardless of that, both idioms have the component of a particularly big animal in order to emphasize the hunger.

<sup>27</sup> Ammer, 1997, p. 173

<sup>28</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/I+could+eat+a+horse>

*Eat like a horse* alludes to eating large amounts of food.<sup>29</sup> As opposed to that, it is more common in Croatia to hear that someone is eating like a pig since pigs are normally seen as gluttonous animals that are even encouraged to eat more, to make for a greater slaughter.

*A willing horse* is someone who is not opposed to any work.<sup>30</sup> The idiom stems from the fact that horses were used mainly as working animals. In the Croatian language, however, the featured animals are bees, ants and moles probably because they are always on the move.

Another idiom referring to horses as working animals and their strength is *as strong as a horse*. The most widely used equivalent in the Croatian language is *jak kao bik* ('strong as a bull') that could allude to the raw strength bulls possess, which overshadows even the strongest of horses.

*As healthy as a horse* could be seen as another reference to a horse's strength and capability. The Croatian language again features a bull probably for the same reason for which the English language features a horse.

*Pee like a racehorse* is used in a negative context for someone who urinates for a long period of time, but also for someone who excretes a large amount of urine.<sup>31</sup> The origin of the phrase stems from horse racing and the practice of giving racehorses a strong diuretic that was believed to stop the nose bleeding and make them run faster.<sup>32</sup> The Croatian language features a cow due to its size and it is also used in negative context, but it is addressed only towards the female population.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/eat+like+a+horse>

<sup>30</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/willing+horse>

<sup>31</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/pee+like+a+racehorse>

<sup>32</sup> Pavia *et al*, 2010



### 3.3 Horse as the idiom component in the English language and Croatian idioms that do not contain an animal

IDIOM	CROATIAN EQUIVALENT
close the stable door after the horse has bolted	prošla baba s kolačima prošao voz
get on your high horse	dići nos gledati/govoriti s visoka
come down off your high horse	spustiti se na zemlju malo spustiti nos prestati gledati/govoriti s visoka
Hold your horses!	Ne trči pred rudo. Stani malo!
horse sense	zdrav razum
horses for courses	nije svak za sve
ride two horses at the same time	sjediti na dvije stolice
wild horses would not make me do something	ni u ludilu ni za živu glavu ni za sve blago svijeta ne bih ni mrtav
a horse of different colour	to je drugi par rukava to je nešto sasvim deseto to je druga priča/pjesma
(straight) from the horse's mouth	iz prve ruke
Don't spare the horses.	ubaciti u višu brzinu ubaciti u petu brzinu
a camel is a horse designed by a committee	puno babica, kilavo dijete
my kingdom for a horse	dati za što i posljednju kap krvi
see a man about a horse	1. ići tamo gdje car ide pješice 2. otići po piće
tell that to the horse marines	pričaj ti to mojoj babi pričaj to nekom drugom

If one *closes the stable door after the horse has bolted*, they are trying to prevent a problem after it has already occurred.<sup>33</sup> In the Croatian language, *prošla baba s kolačima* ('*grandmother with the cakes is gone*') and *prošao voz* ('*the train is gone*') seem to have a wider usage. More precisely, these equivalents can be used for expressing a lost chance of any kind, not just strictly to refer to the prevention of a problem.

<sup>33</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/close+the+barn+door+after+the+horse+has+bolted>

If someone *gets on their high horse* it means that they are angry about something and are acting as if they are better than others. The reference comes from the period in which large horses were a sign of wealth and could be owned only by knights.<sup>34</sup> In the Croatian language, the equivalent *gledati s visoka* ('look down on someone') has the same background as *get on your high horse*, while *dići nos* ('raise one's nose') refers to lifting one's head high with a disdainful expression.

*Come down off your high horse* means to stop behaving as if you are better than others.<sup>35</sup> One of the Croatian equivalents, *spustiti se na zemlju* ('get down on the ground'), means that one should put both feet firmly on the ground because they have lost touch with reality. As the aforementioned paragraph mentioned idioms referring to a rise in stature to imply one's importance, the idioms of this paragraph, *prestat i gledati s visoka* ('stop looking down on someone') and *malo spustiti nos* ('lower one's nose'), serve as counterparts to them, prompting people to humble themselves.

*Hold your horses* means 'wait' or 'be patient'. According to The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms, the term originates from the 1840s and it refers to a driver holding the reins tightly in order to make the horses wait.<sup>36</sup> According to Hrvatski jezični portal, the Croatian equivalent *stani malo* ('hold a little') can be used in speech in order to suggest that the interlocutor should listen to other people's opinion.<sup>37</sup>

*Horse sense* refers to common sense. This term originates from the American West where, as opposed to the rest of the world, horses were seen as smart creatures.<sup>38</sup> In the Croatian

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<sup>34</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/get+on+your+high+horse>

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>36</sup> Ammer, 1997, p. 497

<sup>37</sup> [http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search\\_by\\_id&id=d1tWRQ%3D&keyword=stati](http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=d1tWRQ%3D&keyword=stati), trans. L. Štebih

<sup>38</sup> Ammer, 1997, p. 505

language, if one has *zdrav razum*, it means that they are capable of clear judgement.<sup>39</sup> The adjective *zdrav* ('healthy') emphasizes a person's capability to think logically.

*Horses for courses* expresses the fact that not everyone is suited for every type of job or cannot cope with any type of situation.<sup>40</sup> The term stems from the fact that there are different horses for different types of activities such as dressage, show jumping, horse racing etc. In the Croatian language, *nije svak za sve* ('not everyone is for everything') seems to be a translation of the definition of its English counterpart *horses for courses*.

*Ride two horses at the same time* is used for doing two things at the same time even though it might be impossible to successfully do them.<sup>41</sup> The phrase might stem from the impossibility of riding two horses at once. The Croatian equivalent *sjediti na dvije stolice* ('sit on two chairs') has a negative connotation often referring to infidelity.

*Wild horses* in the expressions *wild horses would not make me do something* or *wild horses would not make me do something* means that one would not do something even if forced to do it.<sup>42</sup> The Croatian language uses as equivalents some of the worst states one can experience: craziness and death.

*A horse of different colour*, also used as *a horse of another colour*, is used to describe something entirely different. It is believed that the phrase was introduced by Shakespeare, who wrote 'a horse of that color' alluding to something that is the same. However, by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the expression was used to suggest diversity rather than similarity.<sup>43</sup> In the Croatian language, number ten in the expression *to je nešto sasvim deseto* ('that is something

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<sup>39</sup> [http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search\\_by\\_id&id=dltvWRg%3D&keyword=razum](http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=dltvWRg%3D&keyword=razum), trans. L. Štebih

<sup>40</sup> *Collins Cobuild dictionary of idioms*, 1995, p. 217

<sup>41</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/ride+two+horses+at+the+same+time>

<sup>42</sup> *Collins Cobuild dictionary of idioms*, 1995, p. 217

<sup>43</sup> Ammer, 1997, p. 505

*tenth*’) emphasizes the fact that the matter at hand is so far-fetched that it does not even come close to the aforementioned original statement or topic.

*Straight from the horse’s mouth* means that the source is reliable. The origin seems to be the same as that of the idiom *don’t look a gift horse in the mouth*, in other words, determining the age of the horse by looking in its mouth.<sup>44</sup> The Croatian equivalent, *iz prve ruke* (*‘from the first hand’*), might allude to the fact that when certain information goes from one person to the other, it slowly loses its authenticity due to people adding their own facts that might not be true. In other words, it is better to hear a story *iz prve ruke* because it is undoubtedly true.

*Don’t spare the horses* is an expression that alludes to doing something as quickly as possible.<sup>45</sup> The term might stem from the period in which horses were used for delivering the mail, or in general, for any type of work that needed to be done as fast as possible. The Croatian equivalents, however, refer to vehicles, i.e. *ubaciti u višu brzinu* (*‘shift into higher gear’*) and *ubaciti u petu brzinu* (*‘shift into the fifth gear’*).

*A camel is a horse designed by a committee* refers to the committee’s inability to produce the results that are not of poor quality or inefficient. This happens due to the committee taking into account many different viewpoints and opinions.<sup>46</sup> This idiom comically and ironically describes what one gets when they listen to everyone’s opinions. A camel and a horse can both be used for transportation needs and even have some similar features (mammals, four legs), but due to everyone’s need to be right, the end result is not always satisfactory. The Croatian equivalent *puno babica, kilavo dijete* (*‘a lot of midwives, softy child’*) proves the fact that you should have your own opinion and ask for advice only if necessary.

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<sup>44</sup> Ammer, 1997, p. 369

<sup>45</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/Don%27t+spare+the+horses>

<sup>46</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/a+camel+is+a+horse+designed+by+a+committee>

*My kingdom for a horse* expresses the willingness of someone to give everything in his possession for the one thing he desires most in that particular moment. The idiom is from Shakespeare's *Richard III* in which Richard's only wish is to have a horse because he is losing a battle.<sup>47</sup> The need for a horse made him want to give up everything he has, the kingdom, and what makes him who he is, the king. In the Croatian language, this notion is expressed through the willingness to give up the last drop of blood, the liquid that keeps us alive.

*See a man about a horse* is a peculiar idiom used for going to the toilet or ordering more drinks.<sup>48</sup> The Croatian equivalent for going to the toilet is *ići tamo gdje car ide pješice* ('to go where the emperor goes on foot'). To my knowledge, the term is archaic and used mostly by the older population. The idea behind it is that not even an emperor, who is always served and surrounded by the servants, wants anybody present when going to the toilet. However, for ordering more drinks, there are no equivalents in the Croatian language.

*Tell that to the horse marines* is an expression uttered in disbelief. Historically speaking, horse marines never existed. The Royal Marines included only infantry and artillery, never cavalry.<sup>49</sup> Having that in mind, the expression means that one could tell something only to an imaginary person because no living person would believe such thing. If someone says *pričaj to nekom drugom* ('tell it to someone else') or *pričaj ti to mojoj babi* ('tell it to my grandmother'), they are making it clear that they are not stupid enough to believe the story, but if one is determined to prove that they are right, they can try talking to grandmothers because they like listening to stories and are known to pry into other people's business.

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<sup>47</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/my+kingdom+for+a+horse>

<sup>48</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/See+a+man+about+a+horse>

<sup>49</sup> Brewer, 2001, p. 568

### 3.4 Horse as the idiom component in the English language with no idiom equivalent in the Croatian language

<b>IDIOM</b>	<b>CROATIAN EQUIVALENT</b>
a one horse-town	vukojebina
a charley horse	grč
hobby-horse	omiljena tema opsesija
clotheshorse	kaćiperka
Mrs. Astor's plush horse	kaćiperka kindur
horse opera	kaubojski film western
horse and buggy	iz vremena kočija predautomobilski pretpotopni starinski
horse around	naganjati se
salt horse	usoljena govedina
(old) war horse	stara garda, veteran, pouzdanik
horse laugh	prostački smijeh, grohotanje
a stalking horse	1. lažni protukandidat 2. krinka, paravan
on the horse	biti na heroinu
put a horse out to pasture	poslati u penziju
as rare as a rocking horse manure	vrlo rijetko ili nepostojeće
a gift horse	dar male vrijednost
better get on (one's) horse	bilo bi najbolje da krenem
dead horse	iscrpljen argument nešto što je nabolje zaboraviti
drive a coach and horses through	otkriti rupe u zakonu
enough to choke Caligula's horse	i više nego dovoljno
every horse thinks his own pack heaviest	svatko misli da je njemu najgore
frighten the horses	prirediti neugodnost
hitch (one's) horses together	združenim/udruženim snagama
horse and rabbit stew	imati i prednosti i mane
horse trading	pogađanje među političarima
no horse in this race	ne imati udjela u čemu
hang all one's bells on one horse	ne htjeti ostaviti imetak samo jednom djetetu
play the horses	kladiti se na konjskim utrkama
only fools and horses work	samo budale i konji rade

The table above features idioms that do not have idioms as equivalents in Croatian and one needs to look up their original meaning in order to find a suitable one-word equivalent or a whole phrase.

A *one-horse town* alludes to a place that is small and unimportant. The idiom was first recorded in 1850s, used for a town so small that one horse would be enough to fulfil the transportation needs.<sup>50</sup> Since the expression is normally used in a negative context, the Croatian equivalent would be *vukojebina*; *selendra* or *zabit* having too positive connotations.

A *charley horse* is an interesting one because it is a term for a cramp, but it is not known where the expression comes from. According to The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms, it was first used in the 1880s as a part of the baseball slang, but later became more widespread. Another likely theory is that Charley was the name of the draft horse that started limping.<sup>51</sup>

*Hobby-horse* refers to a topic that a certain person talks constantly about. It is used in the phrases *get on (one's) hobby-horse* and *ride (one's) hobby-horse*.<sup>52</sup> The expression probably stems from one of the most popular children's toys of all time, a wooden stick with a horse's head.

*Clotheshorse* is used for people who are obsessed with clothes and their looks.<sup>53</sup> A clothes horse is also the item used for hanging clothes to dry, i.e. clothes rack. The reference could be that *clotheshorses* like to put anything and everything on themselves thinking they look good.

*Mrs. Astor's plush horse* could be an equivalent of *clotheshorse* because it refers to an ostentatious and pretentious person. Sometimes used as *Mrs. Astor's pet horse*, the phrase

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<sup>50</sup> Ammer, 1997, p. 746

<sup>51</sup> Ivi, p. 184

<sup>52</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/Hobby-horse>

<sup>53</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/clotheshorse>

originates from a 19<sup>th</sup> century New York City socialite, William Astor's wife Caroline, who loved spending money on clothes. It is a phrase with a negative connotation used to make fun of someone who would come to Mrs. Astor's party ridiculously dressed as if he/she was her favourite plaything.<sup>54</sup> The Croatian equivalent is again *kaćiperka* or *kinđur* or even *kao paradni konj*, which will be analysed in one of the tables below.

*Horse opera* is a term used for a Western movie.<sup>55</sup> The name stems from the fact that horses are some of the main characters in these types of movies. The Croatian equivalent *kaubojski film* derives its name from cowboys, who are the main characters. Another equivalent is *vestern*.

*Horse and buggy* is an expression that symbolizes old-fashionedness because it refers to a carriage pulled by a horse. In the dictionaries, it can also be found as *horse and carriage*.<sup>56</sup>

*Horse around* is an idiom that is used for indulging in a foolish play or activity.<sup>57</sup>

*Salt horse* is salted beef. The term was popular amongst sailors.<sup>58</sup>

*(Old) war horse* has its origins in the 1600s and it was used for a horse, more precisely a military charger that took part in many battles. In the 1800s the term started to be used for human veterans and in the 1900s it was also used for popular musical works.<sup>59</sup> In the Croatian language, *veteran* can be used both for horses and people, but there is no equivalent when it comes to musical works.

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<sup>54</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/Mrs.+Astor%27s+plush+horse>

<sup>55</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/horse+opera>

<sup>56</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/horse+and+buggy>

<sup>57</sup> Ammer, 1997, p. 505

<sup>58</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/salt+horse>

<sup>59</sup> Ammer, 1997, p. 1142



*Horse laugh* is an expression used in a negative context and is used for someone who laughs sarcastically.<sup>60</sup>

If someone is *a stalking horse*, he “...stands against the leader of a party to test the strength of any opposition to the leader. They then withdraw in favour of a stronger challenger, if it looks likely that the leader can be defeated”.<sup>61</sup> Another definition of the expression is “something that is being used to obtain a temporary advantage so that someone can get what they really want at a later date”.<sup>62</sup> Historically, *stalking horses* were used by hunters, allowing them to hide behind them in order to get closer to a particular bird that they were hunting.<sup>63</sup> The Croatian equivalent for politics is *lažni protukandidat* (‘false rival’) and a more general one is *krinka* or *paravan* (‘masque’).

If someone is *on the horse*, it means he/she is addicted to and using heroin.<sup>64</sup> *Horse* is a slang word that might be used because both words start with *h*, but it could also be due to the fact that sometimes race horses get illegally drugged in order to achieve better results.

*Put a horse out to pasture* is an expression used when someone is about to retire.<sup>65</sup> The origin stems from putting the horses out to pasture due to their age.

*As rare as a rocking horse manure* expresses something so rare that it is almost non-existent. The expression is used as a part of the Irish vulgar slang.<sup>66</sup> The Croatian language does not have an idiom equivalent except saying that something is *vrlo rijetko* (‘very rare’) or *nepostojeće* (‘non-existent’). The only expression alluding to rarity is *kao suho zlato* (‘as pure gold’), but it is used for something so rare that it is considered to be precious and valuable.

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<sup>60</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/horse+laugh>

<sup>61</sup> *Collins Cobuild dictionary of idioms*, 1995, p. 216

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>63</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/Stalking+horse>

<sup>64</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/on+the+horse>

<sup>65</sup> Ammer, 1997, p. 853

<sup>66</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/as+rare+as+rocking+horse+manure>

A *gift horse* refers to an unwanted gift. It is a part of the expression *don't look a gift horse in the mouth*, but it can also be a stand-alone idiom. It can also be a reference to the Trojan horse.<sup>67</sup>

*Better get on (one's) horse* is an idiom used for when someone is about to leave.<sup>68</sup>

*Dead horse* is often used as a part of the *beat a dead horse* phrase, but it can be used by itself when talking about a topic or issue that is no longer relevant.<sup>69</sup>

*Drive a coach and horses through* emphasizes the size of the weak points in a certain argument, statement or even a criminal case. The weak points (holes) are so big that one can drive a carriage and the horses through.<sup>70</sup>

*Enough to choke Caligula's horse* is used to emphasize the sheer quantity of something. The reference to Caligula comes from the fact that he was known to be very extravagant and wanted to make his horse a consul.<sup>71</sup>

*Every horse thinks his own pack heaviest* refers to the fact that everyone thinks his own problems are the worst.<sup>72</sup>

*Frighten the horses* refers to causing shock or distress of any type.<sup>73</sup> Some of the Croatian counterparts could be *priređiti neugodnost* ('cause inconvenience') or *šokirati* ('shock').

*Hitch (one's) horses together* is a phrase used when two people work together in harmony.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/gift+horse>

<sup>68</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/better+get+on+one%27s+horse>

<sup>69</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/dead+horse>

<sup>70</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/drive+a+coach+and+horses+through>

<sup>71</sup> [https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/enough+\(something\)+to+choke+Caligula%27s+horse](https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/enough+(something)+to+choke+Caligula%27s+horse)

<sup>72</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/Every+horse+thinks+its+own+pack+heaviest>

<sup>73</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/frighten+the+horses>

<sup>74</sup> Siefring, 2004, p. 145

*Horse and rabbit stew* is an expression used in business and economics and it refers to a situation consisting of both unpleasant and pleasant things, but with more unpleasant ones.<sup>75</sup>

*Horse trading* refers to the negotiations characterized by shrewdness and hard bargaining.<sup>76</sup>

When someone says they have *no horse in this race* it means they are not affected by the outcome of a certain event.<sup>77</sup>

*Hang all one's bells on one horse* is an archaic expression used in Great Britain and it means that one does not want to leave all his property to one child.<sup>78</sup>

*Play the horses* is an idiom that originates from horse racing and it refers to placing the bets on race horses.<sup>79</sup>

*Only fools and horses work* is an expression used by someone who wants to emphasize the fact that someone can find an easier way to earn money.<sup>80</sup> When it comes to the Croatian language, this expression can only be translated literally as *samo budale i konji rade*, which is the reason why the name of the popular series *Only Fools and Horses* is translated as *Mučke* ('*shady dealings*').

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<sup>75</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/horse+and+rabbit+stew>

<sup>76</sup> Ammer, 1997, p. 505

<sup>77</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/no+horse+in+this+race>

<sup>78</sup> Dolgoplov, 2010, p. 159

<sup>79</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/play+the+horses>

<sup>80</sup> <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/only+fools+and+horses+work>

#### 4. Analysis of horse idioms in the Croatian language

The Croatian language is not as rich in words, phrases and expressions as the English language. It features a lot of loanwords that come from Turkish, Italian, German and other languages.

The table below shows that the Croatian language has two times fewer idioms than the English language and that there are far fewer idioms that do not have English counterparts. One of the main reasons for the scarcity of the idioms could be that actually only Slavonia has natural conditions suitable for horse breeding. Another reason could be that there might be more idioms, but they were lost along with the older population because the language was never sufficiently researched.

##### 4.1 Horse as the idiom component in both Croatian and English language

IDIOM	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT
kao paradni konj	Mrs. Astor's plush horse proud as a peacock
za konja ubiti	enough to kill/knock out a horse
imati konjske zube	to have horse teeth

The idiom *kao paradni konj* describes a person's way of walking, in other words, it is a proud and confident walk with the head held up.<sup>81</sup> If there are horses involved in a parade or a ceremony, they are certainly beautifully decorated and their reins are being pulled up so they keep their heads up, looking more proud, powerful and beautiful. The closest English equivalents are *Mrs. Astor's plush horse*, already featured in one of the tables above, and

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<sup>81</sup> Vidović Bolt *et al*, 2017, p. 66, trans. L. Štebih

*proud as a peacock*, since peacock is one of the most beautiful birds that likes to show off its colourful feathers.

*Za konja ubiti* alludes to a large amount of something such as medicine or alcohol that is so strong that not even a horse could handle it.<sup>82</sup> The equivalent is *enough to kill/knock out a horse*.

If someone's teeth are described as *konjski zubi*, that person has big protruding teeth.<sup>83</sup> In the English language, *horse teeth* is a derogatory term used in the same way as in the Croatian language.

#### 4.2 Horse as the idiom component in the Croatian language and another animal as the component in the English language

IDIOM	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT
svaki Cigo svoga konja hvali	all his geese are swans
starog konja ne možeš naučiti nove trikove	you can't teach an old dog new tricks
držati magarca dok ne dođe konj	bird in a hand is worth two in the bush
naraditi se kao konj	work like a dog/galley slave work your socks off
tegliti/vući kao konj	
baviti se konjskim poslom	
pijan kao konj	drunk as a skunk/fiddler/lord
pobjegli su konji (komu)	old dog
stari konj	no spring chicken

*Svaki Cigo svoga konja hvali* ('every Gypsy praises his own horse') is used when someone praises their own products in order to sell them for a better price or to be more known in the society for the quality of certain products.<sup>84</sup> Gypsies are famous for their negotiation skills and their ability to earn more even if the product is not that good. However, in the English

<sup>82</sup> Vidović Bolt et al., 2017, p. 68, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>83</sup> Ivi, p. 69, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>84</sup> [http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search\\_by\\_id&id=f1xnXRU%3D&keyword=Ciganin](http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=f1xnXRU%3D&keyword=Ciganin), trans. L. Štebih

language the featured animals are a goose and a swan, due to their similarity in appearance. The difference is that swans are seen as more beautiful and are admired, while geese are seen only as farm animals.

*Starog konja ne možeš naučiti nove trikove* ('you cannot teach an old horse new tricks') refers to older people being slow on the uptake.<sup>85</sup> In the equestrian world, horses start being ridden and trained at the age of 3 which is pretty early if we take into account the fact that their average lifespan is between 25 and 30 years. When horses reach a certain age, they are not able to comprehend certain things anymore so they need to be retired. The same goes for humans and, in this particular phrase, *stari konj* is used as a derogatory term for an older person, emphasizing inability and stupidity. In the English version of the idiom, the featured animal is a dog and, as opposed to the Croatian equivalent, the *tricks* are used quite literally since humans like to teach them to dogs. Nevertheless, even dogs have better learning abilities while they are young.

*Držati magarca dok ne dođe konj* ('hold on to the donkey until a horse comes along') means that one should stick with what they have until a better option occurs.<sup>86</sup> Donkeys were always seen as horses of the poor. The English equivalent *a bird in a hand is worth two in the bush* just emphasizes the fact that one should be happy with what they have.

*Naraditi se kao konj* ('work like a horse'), *tegliti* or *vući kao konj* ('pull like a horse') and *baviti se konjskim poslom* ('do horses' work') are all different idioms with the same meaning which is working hard.<sup>87</sup> The English language features galley slaves, known for working until death, and a dog, probably because of their guarding instincts and the need to keep their master safe at all times.

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<sup>85</sup> Bendow, 2009, p. 104, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>86</sup> [http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search\\_by\\_id&id=e11gWxc%3D&keyword=magarac](http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=e11gWxc%3D&keyword=magarac), trans. L. Štebih

<sup>87</sup> Vidović Bolt *et al.*, 2017, pp. 67-9

If someone is very drunk, it is said that he is *pijan kao konj* ('drunk as a horse').<sup>88</sup> The connection between horses and inebriation is quite unclear even though it might be linked to the phrase *stari konj*. The English language features a fiddler, a lord and a skunk. It is logical that, in the past, lords tended to get drunk since they had enough money to buy huge amounts of wine and very often they would organise feasts and parties at which fiddlers would play. These fiddlers would be paid with food and drinks.<sup>89</sup> However, the origin of the phrase *as drunk as a skunk* is not clear and the only reason for using the skunk is the rhyme.<sup>90</sup>

*Stari konj* ('old horse') has already been mentioned as a derogatory term for an older person. The idiom equivalents in the English language are *old dog* and *no spring chicken*.

#### 4.3 Horse as the idiom component in the Croatian language and English idioms that do not contain an animal

IDIOM	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT
biti na konju	be riding high
i mi konja za trku imamo	that's a game two can play at
pasti s konja na magarca	jump out of the frying pan (and) into the fire come/go down in the world out of the God's blessing into the warm sun
princ na bijelom konju	Prince Charming knight in shining armour
ući/doći/stići na bijelome konju	make an entrance
uporan kao konj	keep one's nose to the grindstone don't give up the ship
imati konjske živce	have nerves of steel
veži konja gdje ti aga kaže	if the master says the crow is white, the servant must not say 'tis black
za konjski nokat	by a hair/whisker
glup kao konj	dumb as a post not much between the ears
zaljubiti se kao konj	head over heels in love

<sup>88</sup> Vidović Bolt *et al.*, 2017, p. 67

<sup>89</sup> *Collections Historical & Archaeological Relating to Montgomeryshire*, 1877, p. 209

<sup>90</sup> <https://www.revolution-bars.co.uk/blog/drunken-as-a-skunk-and-other-weird-sayings/>

ljubomorani kao konji	eaten up with jealousy green with envy
paradni konj	feather in (one's) cap
napraviti/praviti od muhe konja	a storm in a teacup make a mountain out of a molehill
upregnuti kao konja	saddle (one) with (something or someone)
ne kudi konja kojeg nisi jahao	don't dish it until you've tried it

*Biti na konju* ('*be on a horse*') is used when someone finds himself in a better position than before.<sup>91</sup> The reference might be from the times when there were huge differences between the rich and the poor. The rich were in a better financial position and were able to afford horses. The English equivalent, *be riding high*, is fairly similar to the Croatian idiom.

*I mi konja za trku imamo* ('*we also have a horse for the race*') is used when someone has something to brag about.<sup>92</sup> This phrase might originate from the fact that only the rich have enough money to afford race horses in order to compete in the horse races. So if someone says *i mi konja za trku imamo*, they are showing off in order to make themselves more important than they actually are. According to the Hrvatsko-engleski frazeološki rječnik, the equivalent is *that's a game two can play at*, but it seems that the English idiom can be used only when it comes to behaviour (offending someone) while the Croatian one is used for material things too.

*Pasti s konja na magarca* ('*fall from the horse onto a donkey*') is used when someone goes from better to worse.<sup>93</sup> The donkey was always seen as the poorer version of the horse, while horses were reserved for the elite.

*Princ na bijelom konju* ('*prince on a white horse*') is the perfect man that every woman dreams of.<sup>94</sup> The reference probably comes from the tales because the man that comes to save

<sup>91</sup> [http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search\\_by\\_id&id=elpuWxE%3D&keyword=konj](http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=elpuWxE%3D&keyword=konj), trans. L. Štebih

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>94</sup> [http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search\\_by\\_id&id=eVZjXhQ%3D&keyword=princ](http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=eVZjXhQ%3D&keyword=princ), trans. L. Štebih



the princess is always on a white horse, hence the synonym, *princ iz bajke* ('*fairytale prince*'). Historically, white horses were seen as more valuable than the ones of any other colour. They were more expensive and owned only by the rich. The English language uses the phrases *Prince Charming*, due to the man's irresistible charm and good manners, and *knight in shining armour*, probably because in the past the perfect man had to be from a rich family and own a lot of property meaning that he had enough money to have an armour and make sure that it was in perfect condition.

*Stići na bijelome konju* ('*arrive on a white horse*') means to arrive in full glory.<sup>95</sup> The emphasis here is again on the rarity and appreciation of the white horses.

*Uporan kao konj* ('*persistent like a horse*') refers to the horse's characteristic of being persistent and relentless in what it does<sup>96</sup>, but only in the case of liking the activity or its master. Most people would say that the equivalent is *as stubborn as a mule*, but it is not, because it is used in different situations. *Uporan kao konj* is used for obstinate people who are trying to work as hard as they can in order to succeed. *As stubborn as a mule* is used for ignorant people who believe that their opinion is right even though it is not. Taking into account the previous explanation, the right equivalents would be *keep one's nose to the grindstone* and *don't give up the ship*.

*Imati konjske živce* ('*have horse's nerves*')<sup>97</sup> means that one has very strong nerves and could refer to the horse's ability of putting up with the worst owners and enduring the hardest tasks. The ability of withstanding the worst conditions is even more emphasized in the English equivalent *to have nerves of steel* since steel is known to be one of the strongest materials.

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<sup>95</sup> [http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search\\_by\\_id&id=elpuWxE%3D&keyword=konj](http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=elpuWxE%3D&keyword=konj), trans. L. Štebih

<sup>96</sup> Vidović Bolt *et al.*, 2017, p. 68

<sup>97</sup> Ivi, p. 69

*Veži konja gdje ti aga kaže* ('tie your horse where the lord tells you') refers to the importance of listening to your master's orders and not disagreeing with him.<sup>98</sup> According to the Hrvatsko-engleski frazeološki rječnik, the equivalent is the proverb *if the master says the crow is white, the servant must not say 'tis black* that actually emphasizes the importance of obeying since crows cannot be white.

*Za konjski nokat* ('by a horse's nail') means to make a mistake or miss something by a bit.<sup>99</sup> The expression is used ironically because a horse's hoof is not that small. The equivalents in the English language are *by a hair* and *by a whisker*, but are not used ironically.

If someone is very stupid, he is *glup kao konj* ('dumb as a horse').<sup>100</sup> This idiom is actually a paradox since horses are known to be very smart. The phrase might originate from the fact that it is in horse's nature to obey their master regardless of what he wants from the horse. The horse will stupidly fulfil his master's wishes to the point of suffering. The English language has many equivalents of this idiom and some of them are *dumb as a post*, used in the Croatian language as *glup kao stup*, and *nothing between the ears*, alluding to the fact that one does not have a brain.

*Zaljubiti se kao konj* ('to fall in love like a horse'), again, alludes to the belief that horses are stupid, meaning that if somebody is *zaljubljen kao konj*, he is stupid enough to do anything for the other person even though it might not be worth it.

Another reference to stupidity is *ljubomorani kao konj* ('jealous as a horse'), meaning that someone is jealous to the point of making stupid decisions and not thinking rationally.<sup>101</sup> The English language utilizes the colour green in order to emphasize the unhealthiness of the jealousy.

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<sup>98</sup> Bendow, 2009, p. 104, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>99</sup> Vidović Bolt *et al.*, 2017, p. 69, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>100</sup> Ivi, p. 66, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>101</sup> Ivi, p. 67, trans. L. Štebih

*Paradni konj* ('parade horse') refers to something that one is proud of.<sup>102</sup> During parades, people like to take their best horse, decorate it and show it off with pride.

*Napraviti od muhe konja* ('make a horse out of a fly') is the derivative of the more famous idiom *raditi od muhe slona* ('make an elephant out of a fly'), emphasizing someone's ability to over-exaggerate certain things.<sup>103</sup> The English equivalent, *a storm in a teacup*, humorously depicts a minor problem that has been blown out of proportion.

*Upregnuti kao konja* ('to harness like a horse') is used when someone is overburdened with business or household responsibilities.<sup>104</sup> The reference here is the horse as a working animal.

*Ne kudi konja kojeg nisi jahao* ('do not criticise a horse you have not ridden') means that one should never judge something he has never tried before. The expression is also used in sexual context.<sup>105</sup>

#### 4.4 Horse as the idiom component in the Croatian language with no idiom equivalent in the English language

IDIOM	ENGLISH EQUIVALENT
kao lončarski konj	street urchin
imati želudac kao konj	a strong stomach
konjska doza	a large dose
konjska griva	mane
kao cirkuski konj	walking with a knee lift and chin pointed towards chest
konjski zalet-pileći udarac	strong pounce – weak hit
dobru konju sto mana, rđavu samo jedna	a lot of minor deficiencies are better than a big one

<sup>102</sup> Vidović Bolt *et al.*, 2017, p.67, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>103</sup> [http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search\\_by\\_id&id=e1hhXxY%3D&keyword=muha](http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=e1hhXxY%3D&keyword=muha), trans. L. Štebih

<sup>104</sup> Vidović Bolt *et al.*, 2017, p. 68, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>105</sup> [http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search\\_by\\_id&id=elpuWxE%3D&keyword=konj](http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=elpuWxE%3D&keyword=konj), trans. L. Štebih

If someone is *kao lončarski konj* ('like a potter's horse'), they are always on the streets and wandering around even though they should be home at a specific time.<sup>106</sup> The term probably has its origin in the time when potters would arrive in town early in order to sell their products on the streets and their horse would be with them the whole time since it was used for transportation needs. *Street urchin*, however has a slightly negative connotation since it is used for children that live in slums and often behave mischievously.<sup>107</sup>

If someone says that they have *želudac kao konj* ('stomach like a horse'), it means that they can even eat food that is difficult to digest.<sup>108</sup>

*Konjska doza* ('horse's dose') has a somewhat similar connotation to that of the *horse pill* because it emphasizes the quantity of something, in most cases medicine.<sup>109</sup>

*Konjska griva* ('horse mane') is an expression used for thick hair, but it has a slightly negative meaning because it also alludes to tousled hair that needs to be brushed.<sup>110</sup> In the English language, *mane* is used for emphasizing the thickness, length and beauty of someone's hair.<sup>111</sup>

*Kao cirkuski konj* ('like a circus horse') refers to a person who walks with a knee lift and their chin pointed towards their chest.<sup>112</sup> Even though it has a similar meaning as *kao paradni konj*, and both expressions are used sarcastically, *cirkuski konj* seems to be used in a joking way, while *paradni konj* refers to someone who is full of himself.

<sup>106</sup> [http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search\\_by\\_id&id=elpuWxE%3D&keyword=konj](http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=elpuWxE%3D&keyword=konj), trans. L. Štebih

<sup>107</sup> <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/street+urchin>

<sup>108</sup> Vidović Bolt *et al.*, 2017, p. 66, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>109</sup> *Ivi*, p.69, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>111</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/mane>

<sup>112</sup> [http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search\\_by\\_id&id=elpuWxE%3D&keyword=konj](http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=elpuWxE%3D&keyword=konj), trans. L. Štebih

*Konjski zalet – pileći udarac* ('horse's momentum – chicken's punch') is an expression used in football. It refers to a strong pounce, but a weak hit.<sup>113</sup>

*Dobru konju sto mana, rđavu samo jedna* ('a good horse has a thousand flaws, a bad one only has one') means that it is better to have a lot of minor deficiencies than a big one that cannot be resolved.<sup>114</sup>

*Doći do konja i sablje* (to get one's horse and sabre') means that someone is qualified to serve in the army.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Vidović Bolt *et al.*, 2017, p. 69, trans. L. Štebih

<sup>114</sup> [http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search\\_by\\_id&id=elpuWxE%3D&keyword=konj](http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=elpuWxE%3D&keyword=konj), trans. L. Štebih

<sup>115</sup> [http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search\\_by\\_id&id=dlhuXhY%3D&keyword=sablja](http://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search_by_id&id=dlhuXhY%3D&keyword=sablja), trans. L. Štebih

## 5. Conclusion

Horses have been around people since the first humans realized how helpful they can be. At first they were probably used as food, but as time passed by and both humans and horses started evolving more and more, humans found out that horses are useful for work and riding, enabling them to work more effectively and giving them the ability to see new places. Since the lives of humans and horses were so intertwined, it is no wonder that horses have become a crucial part of our language. As we could see in the analysis, the idioms vary in their origins. Some are connected to the stereotypical characteristics of horses while the others are conditioned by different functions that horses had throughout history.

However, there are more differences than similarities between the idioms in the English and Croatian language. There are only a few idioms that feature the horse in both languages and at least half of them are from horse racing. The reason for that could be the influence of the American culture that has taken hold in the form of expressions that have enriched the Croatian language. Regardless of that, the Croatian language still lacks many idioms that would be the equivalents of the English language, the proof being the table 3.4 above. When it comes to animals featured as equivalents in certain Croatian idioms, these are mostly the bull, the dog or the pig, probably due to the cultural factor.

When it comes to the idioms that originate from the Croatian language, there are only a few of them that do not have equivalents in the English language, as can be seen in the table 4.4 above. In general, Croatian idioms are heavily influenced by the culture and customs of a certain region. One idiom can have more variations depending on the area it is used in. Some of these idioms are archaic (*doći do konja i sablje*) while others could become extinct in a couple of years because they are used infrequently and mostly by the older population (*starog konja ne možeš naučiti nove trikove*).

This analysis can be proof of how the environment and different situations that people are surrounded with can influence language development.

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