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# IDIOMS WITH THE LEXEMES MOUTH IN ENGLISH AND USTA IN SERBIAN: A COGNITIVE APPROACH<sup>2</sup>

*Abstract: This paper explores the idioms in the English and Serbian language, which contain the lexemes mouth and usta. The idioms are analysed from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, with the main aim of finding the cognitive mechanisms that underlie these idioms and make it possible to understand them. The idioms are grouped according to the concepts they express and are compared and contrasted in order to find similarities and differences among the idioms in the two languages. The analysis results show that there are not many similarities in the way the idioms are lexicalised in English and Serbian, but that there is significant overlapping in their conceptualisation, which leads to the conclusion that these two languages share universality in conceptualising the world around us.*

Key words: *idioms, mouth, usta, metaphor, metonymy.*

## 1. Introductory remarks

### 1.1. The aim of this paper

This paper deals with the analysis of the idioms in English, which contain the lexeme *mouth*, and those in Serbian, which contain the corresponding lexeme *usta*. The grounds for the analysis is cognitive linguistics, which means that the idioms

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in this paper will be analysed from the perspective of the cognitive concepts that shape the way humans think and linguistically express themselves. The goal of the analysis is to compare and contrast the idioms in the two languages in order to see to what extent the extensions of the two lexemes in question match. The paper, therefore, aims at exploring similarities and differences in conceptualisation and lexicalization of the idioms which contain the lexemes *mouth* in English and *usta* Serbian.

## 1.2. The corpus

The corpus for the analysis consists of 28 units containing the lexeme *mouth* in English and 26 units containing the corresponding lexeme *usta* in Serbian.<sup>3</sup>

The English *mouth* idioms are analysed in order to see how the lexeme *mouth* is conceptualised in English and to see what the relation between the *mouth* idioms in the English corpus is. The idioms are further contrasted to Serbian idioms with *usta* to find the corresponding structures in case they are available in Serbian. The main method employed in this paper is a conceptual analysis, where the idioms are analysed from the cognitive perspective, by the mechanisms of conceptual metaphor and conceptual metonymy.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Theoretical background

The paper is based on cognitive linguistics, which is, in turn, based on the assumption that languages reflect the way people experience the world (Krzyszowski 1990: 213). A language cannot be considered as an abstract, arbitrary system, but as a system that is motivated by how we think and perceive what we see around us, by our conceptual system that governs our linguistic performance (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 3).

Idioms have usually been regarded as one of the most difficult areas both for teaching and learning. They represent a mixed bag, involving metaphors,

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<sup>3</sup> The English part of the corpus has been excerpted from several relevant monolingual English dictionaries and thesauri: *Cambridge Dictionary Online* (CDO), *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (LDOCE), *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus* (MW), *Oxford Dictionaries Online* (OD), *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), *Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (ODI), *A Dictionary of 3800 picturesque idiomatic expressions* (MPD) and *Thesaurus of Traditional English Metaphor* (TEM), while the Serbian part was excerpted from *Rečnik srpskohrvatskoga književnoga jezika Matice Srpske* (RMS) and *Frazeološki rečnik srpskog jezika* (FR).

<sup>4</sup> However, some idioms cannot be explained only by metaphor or only by metonymy, but by both of the mechanisms as they overlap in many cases.

metonymies, pairs of words, similes, sayings, phrasal verbs, grammatical idioms and others (Kövecses 2002: 199) and have traditionally been regarded as a specific group of words with a specific meaning and specific syntactic properties.<sup>5</sup>

However, such an understanding of idioms, as expressions that are independent of each other and of any conceptual system was challenged by a radically different approach to linguistics and psycholinguistics (Kövecses and Szabó 2010: 328). Cognitive linguistics rejected the existing formal theories of meaning and, instead of relying on the objectivist world view, focused on our experience, the conceptual content and its organisation in a language (Evans and Green 2006: 156). On the basis of linguistic evidence, Lakoff and Johnson found that most of our conceptual system is metaphorical in its nature (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 4). Concepts correspond to the preconceptual structures in our experience and are understood directly in terms of these structures (Lakoff 1987: 270). Metaphors in linguistics do not represent just a random combination of lexemes, but the deeply rooted conceptual phenomena that shape the way we think and lexicalise what we have thought of (Geeraerts 2010: 204). They help us understand the structure of a concept by mapping the structure of another, more basic concept to it. On the other hand, metonymy primarily functions as a referential device, where one entity refers to another entity related to it (Lakoff and Johnson 2003: 36).

Idioms are lexicalisations of cognitive mechanisms. In cognitive view, they are in most cases motivated by different kinds of cognitive mechanisms: metaphors, metonymy and by our general knowledge of the world (Kövecses 2002: 201). The motivation for words to occur in an idiom lies in the cognitive mechanisms which link domains of knowledge to idiomatic meanings (Kövecses and Szabó 2010: 330). Cognitivism and more recent researches show that the meaning of an idiom is understood and explained by the lexemes that are in it: those meanings that are less prototypical become semantically extended and get metaphorical meaning (Krzyszowski 1990: 227).

### 3. CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS IN IDIOMS WITH THE LEXEMES

#### *MOUTH AND USTA*

The idioms in the corpus are grouped according to the source conceptual domains related to the mouth: SPEAKING IS (NOT) USING THE MOUTH, THE MOUTH IS A CONTAINER and A MOUTH FOR A PERSON.

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<sup>5</sup>This view has also led to the traditional presentation of idioms in dictionaries, as they are usually presented as entries separated from the lexeme(s) that are their integral parts (Vajs – Žic-Fuchs 1998: 263)

### 3.1. SPEAKING IS (NOT) USING THE MOUTH

Although the primary function of the mouth is that of taking food, there is only one example found in the dictionaries that refers to eating<sup>6</sup>. The mouth is primarily seen as one of the speech organs, and the conceptual link for understanding the idioms in this group is the metonymy SPEECH ORGAN FOR SPEAKING (Radden 2001: 58), which represents the INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION metonymic type of relationship (Kövecses 2002: 154). In the idioms in this group, the mouth as an instrument metonymically stands for the action of speaking. The idioms in this group are classified into three subgroups, according to the specific metaphor related to each of them: STARTING SPEAKING IS OPENING THE MOUTH, STOPPING SPEAKING IS CLOSING THE MOUTH and THE MANNER OF SPEAKING IS HAVING A SPECIFIC MOUTH.

#### 3.1.1 STARTING SPEAKING IS OPENING THE MOUTH

The meaning of the only English idiom in this group (1) *to open the mouth* (LDOCE) is explained by the concept of the mouth as representing a speech organ which, as a whole, contains several speech organs whose specific functions it may take over (Radden 2001: 75). As with the mouth closed it is impossible to speak, opening the mouth enables other articulators inside it to produce speech.

This group has several idioms in the Serbian language. The corresponding idiom to the English idiom *to open the mouth* is (1a) *otvoriti usta* (RMS). The same idiom, modified by the indirect object (*otvoriti nekome usta*) is used to mean *to force somebody else to speak*. Here, the control over the speaking activity is within another person's domain and refers to forcing speech. The speaker has their mouth closed, while the verb *open* metonymically refers to physically opening the mouth so that speech can be let out. A similar metonymic relationship is found in the idiom (2a) *pustiti iz usta* (*let out of the mouth*)(RMS), where, again, the verb *pustiti* (*to let*) implies not preventing something to happen. In the examples (3a) *prevaliti preko usta* (FR) and (4a) *izleteti iz usta* (FR) the metonymic implication is similar to the previous example, as *prevaliti preko* refers to having difficulties in taking an object over a barrier. In the given idiom, the mouth is the barrier. Metaphorically, it represents the barrier between the words and the space on the outside of the mouth, in the same way that it represents the barrier between the speaker's mind and the

<sup>6</sup>That idiom is *shovel into the mouth*- the only idiom with the lexeme *mouth* found in the consulted dictionaries that refers to taking in food. The semantic extension is on the verb *shovel*, and the metaphor refers to eating such quantities of food that can be taken in by a shovel.

outer world. Another idiomatic expression, (5a) *razvezati usta* (FR), contains the verb with the semantically changed meaning, as all of the above examples: *razvezati* means *to untie, or loosen something*, while in the idiom it refers to the mouth which is not tied and is, therefore, able to produce speech<sup>7</sup>.

### 3.1.2 STOPPING SPEAKING IS TO CLOSE THE MOUTH

As opposed to the previous examples, closing one's mouth implies that the person is not speaking, because the closed mouth disables speech to be uttered. There are three idioms in English: (2) *to shut (someone's) mouth* (LDOCE), (3) *to close (someone's) mouth* (OED) and (4) *to keep your mouth shut* (LDOCE). *To shut (someone's) mouth* is mostly used in the expression *Shut your mouth!*, whereby another person is ordered not to speak. The mouth, as the vehicle entity in this idiom, stands for speaking and is conceptualised as an opening that needs to be closed, while the focus of the metaphor is on the verb *to shut*, which metonymically implies closing (the opening). By the process of generalisation the metonymic vehicle (the mouth) becomes the source domain of the metaphor (Kövecses 2002: 156). *To close (someone's) mouth* has the same conceptualisation as (2); the difference is only pragmatic and depends on the speaker's attitude and intentions. (4) *Keep your mouth shut* is similar to (2) and (3), as the mouth is also viewed as an opening and as the vehicle entity which refers to speaking. It is, however, different in that there are two verbs with their extended meanings: *keep*, whose prototypical meaning *to stay in a particular state, condition or position* has been transferred to *to continue doing something* (LDOCE), and *shut*, which metonymically stands for closing the opening (the mouth) and not talking. A common element for all the three idioms is ordering a command, and all are, consequently, negative.

In Serbian, the closest correspondent to (3) *close (someone's) mouth* is (5a) *zatvoriti (nekome) usta*. The other idioms in this group are partial correspondents to *shut/close someone's mouth* because several Serbian idioms refer to the same concept, but have different lexicalisation. These are (5a) *zapušiti usta*, (6a) *začepiti usta*, (7a) *zapečatiti usta*, (8a) *vezati/svezati usta (nekome)* (FR). Shutting somebody's mouth, therefore, is metaphorically achieved in Serbian in various ways. The focus is on verbs, but in order to properly understand this metaphor, another metaphor; THE MOUTH IS A CONTAINER needs to be used. In (5a) the mouth, metonymically referring to speech, needs to be plugged, as the meaning of *zapušiti* is to fill a

<sup>7</sup> However, in Serbian it is more natural to use the idiom *razvezati jezik*, which in English has its counterpart in the idiom *to loosen someone's tongue*.

small hole. (6a), (7a) and (8a) are similar to (5a), both in their structure and meaning, the only difference lies in the different metonymic reading as the verbs (slightly) differ. In (6a), *začepiti* is interpreted in the same way as *zapušiti*, it is only that *začepiti* indicates that the container is leaking and that is why it needs to be plugged; metonymically speaking, words are leaking out of the mouth and the person speaking needs to stop doing it. The other ways of preventing the contents of a container from getting out is by sealing the mouth (Radden 2001: 76), as in (7a) *zapečatiti usta*, where *zapečatiti* has the prototypical meaning of *closing the container with something that stops air, water etc. from coming in or out of it* (LDOCE), but is used as the metonymy for closing and preventing the mouth from speaking.<sup>8</sup> The same holds for (8a) *vezati/svezati (nekome) usta*: here, closing the mouth is referred to by the metonymy of the verb *to tie up* and its meaning of fastening something so that it cannot move. *Vezati (nekome) usta*, therefore, means that the person has been forced to stop speaking and has a negative connotation.

(9a) *Staviti (nekome) katanac na usta* (RMS) is another idiom in Serbian that is related to the domain of stopping speaking. Its meaning is to put a lock on someone's mouth. The lexeme *katanac* (*the lock*) refers to a lock that is used for closing or fastening something with a key; in this idiom it is metonymically used for locking the mouth so that it cannot be opened.

(10a) *Uvući jezik u usta* (FR) is another example of an idiom with two metonymies. The first one is the relation between *jezik* (*the tongue*) and speech, the other is between *usta* (*the mouth*) and the container. The tongue is under the speaker's control and is willingly kept inside the mouth, which is thought of as a container for thoughts and words (Dragić 2015: 12). These two metonymies together metaphorically refer to stopping speaking (mostly all of a sudden) because the person has realised that in the specific situation it would be more favourable for them not to speak. The mouth and the tongue, therefore, may be seen as jointly contributing to speaking (Radden 2001: 75) as can be seen from another idiom in Serbian (11a) *usta ima, jezik nema*<sup>9</sup>. Here, one of the articulators, the mouth, is present, while the other articulator, the tongue, is not. Both the articulators metonymically stand for speech, but there is no (or very little) speech produced

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<sup>8</sup> There is an idiom in English that corresponds to *zapečatiti usta* and that is *to seal someone's lips*. It also contains the verb *to seal* (*zapečatiti*), but instead of the noun *mouth*, the lexeme is *lips*, where *lips* metonymically stand for speaking.

<sup>9</sup> A very similar idiom, *azvar, diliyok*, is also found in Turkish, meaning *to have a mouth, not to have tongue* (Radden 2001: 75). It probably entered the Serbian language during the period of the Turkish empire and the six-hundred years of Turkish influence on the Serbian people, their culture and language.

because the person is not talkative or is too shy to speak. The mouth, however, is viewed as being of secondary importance to the tongue because the tongue is responsible for producing speech, while the mouth is only there to let the speech be heard.

### 3.1.3. HAVING A SPECIFIC MOUTH FOR THE MANNER OF SPEAKING

As exemplified by the idioms in this group, the mouth is also associated with specific properties that can be metaphorically related to the various manners and aspects of speaking. In (5) *to have a big mouth* (LDOCE), the mouth metonymically refers to speaking. In order to properly understand this idiom, the adjective *big* is crucial: the notion of the physical measure of an entity is used in order to refer to the measure of speaking. Someone with a big mouth is considered *annoying and irritating because they often say things they should not say* (LDOCE)<sup>10</sup>. Another idiom, (6) *to be all mouth* (CDO), metaphorically refers to the person whose dominant characteristic is speaking. *To be all mouth* is used to refer to the *person who talks a lot about doing something, but never does it* (CDO) or who is *not brave enough to do what they say they can do* (LDOCE).

(7) *To be hard in the mouth* (TEM) is the idiom in which the domain of hardness is related to the domain of the manner of speaking. This idiom is used to refer to an obstinate person. The metaphoric relation is based on the physical characteristic of firmness which is metaphorically associated with the mouth and the person's firm and obstinate decision not to speak. In the Serbian language there is an equivalent idiom, *biti tvrd na rečima*, but it is conceptualised in a slightly different and more transparent way: *tvrd* (*hard*) is metaphorically related to *reči* (*words*); it is therefore obvious that the words, which are inside the mouth, are 'hard' and that the speaker is unwilling to speak. The whole metaphor refers to firmness and sternness.

In the idiom (8) *put your foot in your mouth* (LDOCE), the mouth is once again metonymically related to speaking, and the figurative meaning of the entire idiom is *to say something without thinking carefully, so that the speaker or somebody else is embarrassed or upset* (LDOCE). The words are spoken accidentally and are inappropriate and hurtful.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> A Serbian idiom, which almost completely matches in its conceptualisation to *to have a big mouth* is *imati dugačak jezik*. In Serbian, the length represents a physical measure, while the tongue represents the speech: the idiom means *to talk excessively* and is also negatively connotated.

<sup>11</sup> The basis for this metaphor is metonymic, as putting one's foot in the mouth is considered inappropriate, or even painful. There is no evidence of the origin of this idiom in the consulted

Another idiom related to the manner of speaking is (9) *to shoot one's mouth off* (CDO). It is a combination of a metaphor and a metonymy or metonymy within a metaphor (Kövecses 2002: 160). The meaning of the idiom is *to talk too much in an uncontrolled way* (CDO). The first reading is metaphorical, where a source domain, the gun, is mapped onto the target domain, the speech (or, more precisely, onto the mouth, as the organ of speech). The uncontrolled use of a firearm is mapped onto uncontrolled talk, when the speaker talks too much about something that they do not know much about or should not talk about (Kövecses 2002: 160).

Two idioms with similar meaning and the same structure are (10) *have a potty mouth* and (11) *have a foul mouth*. In both of them, the speaker's moral intentions have negative connotations, as the domain of morality is related to the domain of cleanness and correctness: in (10), *potty* refers to the contents of a container used by young children as a toilet, while in (11) *foul* refers to *something unpleasant or even disgusting* (LDOCE). The meanings of both the idioms refer to telling unpleasant, bad or nasty things about other people.

There are many idioms in Serbian that belong to the domain of MOUTH FOR THE MANNER OF SPEAKING. (12a) *Imati velika usta* (FR) semantically completely matches the English idiom (5) *have a big mouth*, but only partially matches conceptually: the part of the metaphor that is the same in both languages is related to the domain of greatness. However, the English idiom refers to telling things that should not be told, while the Serbian idiom is more speaker oriented, as the notion of the physical greatness (*velika*) is used to refer to excessively speaking about oneself and one's own actions and success. (13a) *Govoriti na sva usta* is the idiom which is very similar to (12a): *sva usta* has the metonymic relation with the concepts of completeness and wholeness, and refers to telling everything that the speaker knows about another person. As such behaviour is not considered socially acceptable, the whole metaphor has negative connotations. (14a) *Ispirati usta s nekim* (FR), like (13a), has the figurative meaning of talking openly about other people, but is even more negative as the speaker talks about other people's problems and worries (FR). The metonymy in this idiom is based on the relationship between washing out (*ispirati*) and speaking: by telling all about someone else's problems, the speaker metaphorically washes the words out of the inside of their mouth. In (15a) *ne silaziti s usta* (RMS), the same cognitive mechanism is used in understanding the

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dictionaries and the thesauri, but one of the explanations is that it probably refers to foot-and-mouth disease, a deadly virus found in cattle, when the name of the disease was metaphorically applied to people whose words got them in trouble. Source: <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-origin-of-the-expression-put-ones-foot-in-ones-mouth>



figurative meaning, *to be the main subject of a conversation* (FR), *to be always talked about* (RMS). In (16a) *izgrditi na pasja usta* (FR) the picture of the dog's mouth is related to something that is too unpleasant and hard to endure, and the concept is mapped onto the words that are coming out of the mouth but are very unpleasant to the listener. Another idiom with the negated verbs is (17a) *ne sastaviti usta*. Here, *sastaviti* means 'to put together' and is metonymically related to putting lips together, which prevents the speaker from speaking. As the mouth is not closed, the meaning of this idiom is metaphorically related to talking, not stopping speaking. Two Serbian idioms which are the same in their structure as (10) *have a potty mouth* and (11) *have a foul mouth* are (18a) *imati zla usta* (RMS) and (19a) *imati pogana usta* (RMS). They can be explained by the same metaphorical concept as the English idioms, as *zla* and *pogana usta* have the meaning of telling bad things about other people, which gives rise to the PURITY IS CLEANLINESS metaphor and, further, to MORALITY IS CLEANLINESS. In Serbian, there is the idiom with the same structure, but with the adjective which has the opposite meaning, (20a) *imati zlatna usta*. The colour *zlatna* (golden) is mapped onto the domain of morality: gold is valued as the most precious metal and to *have a golden mouth* is considered to be a favourable characteristic, since the metaphorical meaning of the idiom is to speak eloquently, fluently and in the manner appropriate to the situation.

### 3.2 MOUTH AS A CONTAINER

This group of idioms can be explained by the MOUTH AS A CONTAINER metonymy, although, as will be shown below, it cannot be used as the only one in their interpretation. However, the focus is on the mouth which serves as a container where objects are placed into or taken out of. These idioms have been divided into two groups: those containing words and those containing objects.

#### 3.2.1 MOUTH AS A CONTAINER FOR WORDS

As words that are to be spoken are in the speaker's mouth, many things may happen to them before they are uttered (Radden 2001: 77). The speaker can (12) *put words into somebody's mouth* (ODI) or (13) *take words out of somebody's mouth* (ODI). In (12) the metaphor refers to *suggesting that someone said or meant something that they did not say or mean* (MW). (13) *Take words out of somebody's mouth* refers to telling what someone else was about to say (LDOCE). The metonymic relationship in (13) is established between the actions of taking the

words out of the container and then uttering them instead of the other person. (14) *Straight from the horse's mouth* (TEM) figuratively means *to be told by someone who could be trusted*. The basic metonymy in this idiom is the relationship between the mouth and the container out of which words go out. The other metonymy is the relationship between a horse, which is the symbol of a loyal animal, and a trustworthy person<sup>12</sup>. The idiom (15) *out of the mouths of babes* [*sic*] (MPD) is used when a child has said something that is clever and, usually, true. Apart from the metonymy by which the mouth is represented as a container, the other metonymy is established between a child and wisdom, while wisdom is further mapped onto a child because children are usually straightforward and direct in their speech<sup>13</sup>.

There are two Serbian idioms that belong to this group, (21a) *uzeti nekome reč iz usta* (FR) and (22a) *govoriti kroz nečija usta* (FR). *Uzeti nekome reč iz usta* is the translation equivalent of the English phrase *take words out of somebody's mouth*, which has the same metonymic relation between taking out and uttering words. (22a) does not have an equivalent in English. In this idiom, *govoriti kroz* means *to speak through*, and the metaphor is established by the metonymic relation in which the verb *to speak* is mapped on the idea of expressing an opinion.

### 3.2.2 MOUTH AS A CONTAINER FOR OBJECTS

The idioms in this group are related to the domain of physical things (or objects) that are put into the mouth. In most cases, these idioms are related to people's feelings.

The first in this subgroup is (16) *to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth* (MPD), which means *to be brought up by wealthy parents* (MPD). This idiom is not related to the feelings that people express, but to the state they can find themselves in. The relation between the silver spoon and wealth lies in the fact that silver is expensive; having a silver spoon in the mouth is, therefore, metaphorically considered as positive. An idiom similar in its structure, but partially similar in its meaning is (17) *have the spoon at the mouth* (TEM). Here, having a spoon in the mouth also has a positive connotation, but it metaphorically stands for success, as in earlier times of poverty having a spoon meant that the person had something to eat. The relationship is, thus, established between the spoon and success, and

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<sup>12</sup> The idiom originates from horse racing, as if the horse which participates in the race itself should give a tip to those betting (TEM).

<sup>13</sup> This idiom has origin in the Old and New Testament of the Bible: in Psalms 8:2, God ordains strength out of the mouths of babes and sucklings; in Matthew 21:16, praise comes from this source. Later generations changed strength and praise to wisdom. (DO)

the meaning of the idiom is *to be at the point of success* (TEM). The idioms (18) *to have one's heart in one's mouth* (MPD) and (19) *stand with fingers in (their) mouth* (TEM) both have an object in the mouth, but their semantic interpretation indicates situations which have negative connotations. In (18) the metonymy BODILY FOR EMOTIONAL (which is part of the CONCRETE OVER ABSTRACT metaphor) is also present: the heart is related to our feelings. When the heart is in the mouth, it is the metaphor for being very afraid and alarmed<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, in (19) the fingers are also positioned in the mouth as they figuratively refer to being helplessly inactive. (20) *Have foam at the mouth* (CDO) is different from the idioms (18) and (19), as it refers to being extremely angry. In the source domain, foam has the characteristics of a rough sea, while in the target domain it metonymically refers to a rough temperament. (21) *Have a nasty taste in the mouth* (MPD) is another idiom that is metaphorically related to unpleasant feelings because the adjective *nasty* is related to something that is bad, unkind or even physically filthy, and this idiom could also be explained by the MORALITY IS CLEANLINESS metaphor.

There is only one idiom with the lexeme *usta* in the Serbian language within this group, and that is (23a) *imati/ostaviti gorak ukus u ustima* (RMS). It corresponds to the English phrase (21) *have a nasty taste in the mouth*; the difference is in the adjectives used in English and Serbian (in Serbian, it is *bitter* instead of *nasty*), while the metonymic relations and metaphorical readings remain the same.

### 3.3 MOUTH FOR A PERSON

The MOUTH FOR A PERSON represents the variant of PART FOR THE WHOLE THING metonymy (Kövecses 2002: 152) and is widely found in the structures in which the whole entity can be accessed by a part (Evans and Green 2006: 316). In the idiom (22) *mouth to feed* (LDOCE), the mouth provides a 'route' of access via the metonymic relation of the mouth and the person the mouth belongs to (Evans and Green 2006: 316). The metaphoric meaning of this idiom refers to the person which has to be provided food for. In (23) *useless mouth* (OED), the meaning of *useless* refers to *not having any use or effect* (LDOCE). The metaphor in the idiom is related to a person who is viewed only as a consumer of food, as someone who does no work and yet has to be fed. The third idiom that can be explained by the PART FOR THE WHOLE THING metaphor is (24) *by word of mouth* (LDOCE), which

<sup>14</sup>The corresponding Serbian idiom only partially matches the English one: *srce u petama* is the metaphor which is used when somebody is extremely frightened, and the difference against the English idiom is that in Serbian the heart does not go up into the mouth, but down into the heels. However, the metaphorical reading remains the same.

means *to give information to someone* (LDOCE). In this idiom the mouth provides access to the person, the speaker, who tells/gives information to another person.

There are two idioms that belong to this domain in Serbian. However, the lexeme *usta* has already been defined as *a person (usually a family member) that needs to be given food and shelter; a human being* (RMS). This is clearly the metonymic extension where a body part stands for the whole body, and the metonymy has been used in the following two idioms: (24a) *usta koja treba nahraniti* (RMS) and (25a) *od usta do usta* (RMS). *Usta koja treba nahraniti* is the formal correspondent of *mouth to feed*, while *od usta do usta* is the translation equivalent of *by word of mouth*. As in the latter idiom (25a) *usta* stands for a person, the meaning of the entire idiom refers to transferring information from one person to another.

### 3.4. Other examples

In both languages there are several examples that could not be categorised within any of the above groups and subgroups, as none of the above listed domains or concepts is the dominant one for establishing their meaning.

There are four idioms in English that refer to the mouth of an animal and are not related to speaking: (25) *in the wolf's mouth* (TEM), (26) *when your hand is in the dog's mouth, withdraw it gently* (TEM), (27) *into the mouth of a bad dog often falls a good bone* (TEM) and (28) *a fish wouldn't be caught if it kept its mouth shut* (TEM). However, they all have negative connotations as an animal's mouth is usually viewed as unpleasant or dangerous. In (25) *in the wolf's mouth*, the dominant concept is that of danger; the metaphor of THE DANGEROUS MOUTH is established between the source concept, the wolf's mouth, and the target domain, danger. Being inside a wolf's mouth corresponds, therefore, to being in a deadly peril. A similar interpretation can be used in (26) since the dog's mouth likewise implies sharp teeth that are ready to make a firm grip around an object. The DANGEROUS MOUTH metaphor is at work in this example, as the meaning of the idiom is not to be unfriendly or hostile towards someone who could injure you. The idiom (27) *into the mouth of a bad dog often falls a good bone* has a different metaphorical reading since the most prominent feature of the entire idiom is the opposition between the good and the bad. A bad dog is metonymically related to a person whose moral character is not good, while a good bone is related to nice and pleasant things. The entire metaphor indicates the little correspondence there is between someone's merit(s) and the reward(s) he or she gets. *A fish wouldn't be caught if it kept its*

*mouth shut* with the meaning *we betray ourselves by what we say* (TEM) is the idiom that can partially be explained by the MOUTH FOR SPEAKING metaphor, since the mouth which is shut is not able to produce speech. Still, there is another cognitive concept employed in this idiom, the metaphor CATCHING IS BETRAYING, in which catching a fish is mapped on exposing something that should not be exposed.

Idioms with the corresponding conceptualisation and meaning are not found in Serbian, but there is an idiom with the lexeme referring to animals: (26a) *lete pečeni golubovi/pečene ševe u usta* (FR). This idiom can be interpreted in the way that the birds (pigeons/skylarks) metonymically represent material wealth as they are not an easy catch and their meat (particularly the meat of skylarks) has always been considered a delicacy. The idiom implies living in abundance and wealth without much work.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

As set in the Introduction, the aim of this paper was to explore the similarities and differences in the conceptualisation and lexicalisation of the idioms with the lexemes *mouth* and *usta*. The contrastive analysis showed that there are not many idioms in English and Serbian that match both structurally and formally. However, this should not be misleading, as the main idea of the paper was to explore the underlying mechanisms that motivate the conceptualisation and lexicalisation of the idioms, and which have proved that the idioms in both the languages depend on the same cognitive principles and concepts. The analysis showed that it was possible to categorise all the idioms in English and in Serbian within the same metaphors and/or metonymies. The first group of idioms, interpreted by the STARTING SPEAKING IS OPENING THE MOUTH metaphor, consists of only one English idiom and only one matching Serbian idiom (there are four more Serbian idioms in the group). Serbian is also more productive with regard to the idioms that refer to stopping speaking, as the metaphor STOPPING SPEAKING IS CLOSING THE MOUTH motivates the existence of only three English and eight Serbian idioms. These various metaphorical variations of shutting the mouth are partially explained by the MOUTH AS A CONTAINER metonymy, as the mouth is conceptualised as a container with leaking content, and there are numerous ways of preventing the content from leaking (some of them even aggressive, as in (10a) or (11a) which refer to tying the mouth, or even putting a lock on it). In the case of relating the mouth to a specific manner of speaking, both languages exhibit various idiomatic expressions, and in both languages these expressions bear a negative connotation. As

has already been shown above, the MOUTH AS A CONTAINER metonymy underlies almost all of the idioms within the corpus, but is the dominant one in the third, and the largest group, in which the mouth is viewed as a container that stores not only words and objects, but people's feelings too (the feelings are further metonymically related to other body parts).

The presented analysis of the idioms in English and Serbian has led to the general conclusion, applicable for both languages, that idioms are conceptual, not linguistic in nature. Idioms are not arbitrary pairings of words, but are motivated by our cognitive mechanisms, metaphor, metonymy and our general knowledge of the world (Kövecses and Szábó 2010: 351). In particular, the analysis showed that the idioms in English and in Serbian can be explained by the same cognitive mechanisms that underlie our understanding of the world. Although these concepts are not in most cases lexicalised in the same way in English and in Serbian, they are motivated by the same cognitive structures, which is probably the consequence of the universal way(s) people experience and conceptualise the world around them.

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## IDIOMI SA LEKSEMOM *MOUTH* U ENGLISKOM I *USTA* U SRPSKOM: KOGNITIVNI PRISTUP

### *Rezime*

Rad istražuje idiome u engleskom i srpskom jeziku koji u svom sastavu sadrže lekseme *mouth* i *usta*. Idiomi su istraženi iz perspektive kognitivne lingvistike s ciljem otkrivanja kognitivnih mehanizama

koji omogućavaju njihovo razumevanje, a potom upoređeni u engleskom i srpskom, kako bi se utvrdile sličnosti i/ili razlike između ova dva jezika. Rezultati pokazuju da nema značajnih podudaranja u leksikalizaciji idioma u engleskom i srpskom, ali da značajna podudaranja postoje u njihovoj konceptualizaciji, što znači da ova dva jezika spoljašnji svet doživljavaju na sličan način, ali ga lingvistički izražavaju na drugačiji način.

Ključne reči: idiomi, *mouth*, *usta*, metafora, metonimija.

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