



Of Humans and Animals: Domestic Animal Names for Men and Women in English and Serbian

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Abstract

It is considered common knowledge that the culture of a speech community is reflected in its language. The relationship between culture and language has always been complicated and therefore has always aroused particular interest among scientists. One way of studying this complex but extremely significant relationship is through the analysis of metaphors used by native speakers of a particular language to refer to humans. Metaphors represent one of the oldest and probably most fundamental units of figurative language and are often regarded as the collective wisdom that has been formed by a speech community. Metaphors are indicative of the cultural values, mores, and folk beliefs held by a speech community. The article deals with animal metaphors of the type Human is a domestic animal and You, domestic animal, i.e. similarities and differences in the use of domestic animal names in reference to men and women in English and Serbian. The analysis of a number of such domestic animal metaphors herein has shown that the majority of them are used differently across the two languages and therefore two cultures.

Keywords: metaphor, men, women, animals, domestic animals, English, Serbian

Apstrakt

Opšte je poznato da se kultura jedne jezičke zajednice reflektuje u jeziku te zajednice. Odnos između kulture i jezika oduvek je bio složen i zato je uvek izazivao posebno interesovanje naučnika. Jedan od načina da se prodre u ovaj složen, ali izuzetno značajan odnos, jeste kroz analizu metafora koje izvorni govornici jednog jezika koriste za oslovljavanje ljudskih bića. Metafore predstavljaju jednu od najstarijih i verovatno najosnovnijih jedinica figurativnog jezika i često se posmatraju i kao kolektivna mudrost koju je jedna jezička zajednica formirala. Kao takve, metafore su pokazatelji kulturoloških vrednosti, običaja i verovanja jedne govorne zajednice. Ovaj članak se bavi životinjskim metaforama tipa Ljudsko biće je domaća životinja i Ti domaća životinjo, tj. sličnostima i razlikama u upotrebi imena domaćih životinja prilikom oslovljavanja muškaraca i žena u engleskom i srpskom jeziku. Analiza određenog broja metafora tog tipa u ovom članku pokazala je da se upotreba većine njih razlikuje u dva jezika, odnosno dve kulture.

Ključne reči: metafora, muškarci, žene, životinje, domaće životinje, engleski, srpski

1. Introduction – Defining metaphor

The central idea of this article is to analyze how two languages, English and Serbian, and their respective cultures, view men and women through the prism of the domestic animal kingdom. One way of

doing it is by looking at domestic animal metaphors used by native speakers of English and Serbian to refer to men and women.

The word *metaphor* has its origin in the Greek words *meta* meaning *with/after* and

pherein meaning *bear/carry*, in which the central idea is the one of meanings being transferred (Charteris-Black, 2004). The fact that metaphor has its roots in the Greek language leads us to Aristotle, one of the most influential thinkers in the history of Western thought. According to Aristotle, metaphor is defined as “giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or on grounds of analogy” (as cited in Gibbs, 1994: 210). The Aristotelian definition influenced many contemporary interpretations of metaphor. One such contemporary interpretation is provided by Lakoff and Johnson who argue that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 6). Their cognitive view of metaphor being not only a matter of a language, but also of thought and action, is regarded as a breakthrough in contemporary metaphor study. Within this cognitive linguistic view, metaphor is defined by Kövecses as “understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another” (Kövecses, 2010: 4), hence we have the term *conceptual metaphor*. It includes two conceptual domains, target and source domain, where the former is understood in terms of the latter. For the purpose of this article, we will use the conceptual metaphor of the form *Human is*

a domestic animal or *You domestic animal*, where a domestic animal is understood as “an animal that is not wild and is kept as a pet or to produce food”. (Cambridge Free English Dictionary and Thesaurus. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>).

In both English and Serbian, men and women have always been conceptualized as domestic animals of some kind on account of their physical and/or psychological characteristics such as the size, strength, (un)attractiveness, (un)tidiness, aggressiveness, arrogance, courage, gentleness, greediness, immorality, loyalty, timidity, or lack of good sense.

2. Domestic animals used to refer to men

In the English and Serbian language dictionaries used in this article, *dog (pas)* is defined as a domesticated animal kept by people as a pet or for the purpose of hunting or guarding things. (Cambridge Free English Dictionary and Thesaurus. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>).

(СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>).

Despite being known as the man’s best and most loyal friend, *dog* is used

figuratively in both languages to refer to an unpleasant, contemptible, and dishonest man. e.g. *Come out, Michael, you dog!* ([bnc] British National Corpus. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>). (СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>).

An aggressive and unkempt dog, commonly known as *cur* (*džukela*), is also used in English and Serbian to refer to a contemptible, dishonest, and unprincipled man. (Oxford Dictionaries - Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>). (Rečnik srpskohrvatskoga književnog jezika (1990). (Drugo fototipsko izdanje. ed., p. 917). (n.d.). Novi Sad. Zagreb.: Matica srpska. Matica Hrvatska.)

However, not all figurative uses of the word *dog* are negative. Some are neutral. When used this way, the word *dog* means simply *a fellow/chap*. e.g. *It's true - I'm a lucky dog*. (Oxford Dictionaries - Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>).

Speaking of dogs, we should not forget the words denoting young dogs such as *puppy/pup* (*kuće*). Both *puppy* and *pup* are used in English in a derogatory sense to

characterize cheeky or arrogant men. e.g. *You saucy young pup!* (Oxford Dictionaries - Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>). On the other hand, the same words are used in the Serbian language to refer to bad and unreliable men. (СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>).

Based on the English and Serbian dictionaries consulted for the purpose of this article, *cat* (*mačka*) is not used to refer to men. However, there are two informal words for cat in English – *pussycat/pussy* (*maca*) used in a humorous way to refer to particularly gentle men, but who may not appear this way at first sight. e.g. *Mike likes to make out that he's tough, but he's a pussycat really*. (Cambridge Free English Dictionary and Thesaurus. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>).

When men fail to understand something that falls within human intellectual capacity, native speakers of Serbian tend to use the word *horse* (*konj*) to refer to such men. (СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>).

Interestingly, the same animal finds no figurative use in English. Another horse-like animal – *donkey/ass (magarac)*, when used metaphorically in both languages, indicates lack of good sense in men. e.g. *He's a pompous ass.* (Oxford Dictionaries - Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>). (СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>).

There are other words in English such as *stallion/stud (pastuv)* denoting an adult male horse kept for breeding that people resort to when describing an attractive and sexually skilled man. e.g. *He thinks he's a real stud.* (Cambridge Free English Dictionary and Thesaurus. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>).

To refer to an aggressive man of a very strong build, native speakers of English use an uncastrated male bovine – *bull (bik)*. English Dictionary. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/>.

Similarly, *bull* is used by native speakers of Serbian to refer to very strong or lustful men. *Ox (vo)* is another domesticated bovine used only in the Serbian language

to refer to an adult man considered doltish. (СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>).

While *sheep (ovca)* is used in both languages to refer to easily led people, or those of timid nature, an adult male sheep - *ram (ovan)* is used to describe a sexually active man in English and a stupid man in Serbian. English Dictionary. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/>.

(СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>).

When used metaphorically in English, *goat (jarac)* refers to a man behaving in an unpleasant way and leading a very active sexual life. (Oxford Dictionaries - Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>). It is worth mentioning here that *goat (koza)* may also be used metaphorically in British English to refer to a stupid person, irrespective of their sex or gender. By contrast, the Serbian language dictionaries tell us that *goat (jarac)* is used either to refer to an ugly and scruffy-looking man (usually bearded), or the one who has been cuckolded. (*Rečnik srpskohrvatskoga književnog jezika* (1990). (Drugo fototipsko izdanje. ed., p.

565). (n.d.). Novi Sad. Zagreb.: Matica srpska. Matica Hrvatska.)

Speaking of untidiness, *pig (svinja)* is most likely to be used by native speakers of English and Serbian to refer to greedy, unpleasant, and difficult to deal with men. e.g. *He was an absolute pig to her.* (Cambridge Free English Dictionary and Thesaurus. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>).

(СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>)

We should not forget that the word *pig* is also used of a man who believes men are superior to women. e.g. *Because he, like me, was a male chauvinist pig.* ([bnc] British National Corpus. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/>).

However, that is not where the story of men perceived as pigs ends as we have yet to discuss *hogs* and *boars*. While there were no results for the use of *boar (vepar)* to refer to men in English, *hog (krmak)*, when used figuratively, describes a greedy (especially for food) person. e.g. *You've eaten it all? You hog!* (Cambridge Free English Dictionary and Thesaurus. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>). As for the

figurative use of *boars* and *hogs* in Serbian, only *hog* is used to refer to men, especially in reference to untidy or morally fallen men. (СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>)

Within the world of domestic fowl, men are often conceptualized as *cocks (BrE)/roosters (AmE), chickens, ganders, drakes, and peacocks.*

Cock (petao) is usually used in English to describe an arrogant man, hence the adjective *cocky*, meaning confident in an unpleasant way. Similarly, *rooster (petao)* is used as a term of reference to men considered vain. Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>. The word *cock/rooster* has quite a different meaning within the scope of Serbian metaphorical language. It is usually used to describe a man who is bad-tempered or short-fused. (*Rečnik srpskohrvatskoga književnog jezika (1990)*. (Drugo fototipsko izdanje. ed., p. 399). (n.d.). Novi Sad. Zagreb.: Matica srpska. Matica Hrvatska.)

No animal has been used so far to refer to cowardly people, especially not men. Now, there is the word *chicken (pile)*, an animal afraid and scared of so many things, as believed by most people from the English-

speaking world. It is no wonder then that native speakers of English use *chickens* to characterize men lacking courage. In English, *chickens* are also used to refer to young male homosexuals. Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>. Serbs, by contrast, use the word *chicken* as a term of endearment for a small child. (СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>)

Two other members of fowl that people from the English-speaking world use to describe slow-witted men are *gander* (*gusan*) and *turkey* (*ćuran*). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>. In a similar fashion, Serbs use *gander* to describe an unintelligent man, and the word *turkey* to refer to an easily influenced man. (СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>)

In the Serbian language dictionaries used here, *drake* (*patak*) is used figuratively to refer to a man who staggers while walking, thus resembling a drake's way of walking. (*Rečnik srpskohrvatskoga književnog jezika* (1990). (Drugo fototipsko izdanje. ed., p. 355). (n.d.). Novi Sad. Zagreb.: Matica srpska. Matica Hrvatska.)

Speaking of ways of walking, *peacock* (*paun*) is used in a similar way in English to refer to a vain and strutting man. (Cambridge Free English Dictionary and Thesaurus. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>).

3. Domestic animals used to refer to women

The first animal we discussed within this article was *dog*. It may come as a surprise to some of our readers that *dog* is used in English to describe an unattractive and boring woman. (Cambridge Free English Dictionary and Thesaurus. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>).

What certainly will not come as a surprise to most of our readers is the use of the word *bitch* (*kučka/kuja*) in both languages to describe a malicious, unpleasant, and a woman of low morals. (Cambridge Free English Dictionary and Thesaurus. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>).

(СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>).

Speaking of immoral women, *pig* is another word native speakers of English use to describe such women. Retrieved

October 9, 2015, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

Besides being *bitches*, women are often conceptualized as *cats*, *kittens*, and *pussycats*. When referred to as *cats*, at least in English, women are thought of as malicious and spiteful, or with a tendency to gossip maliciously. On the other hand, Serbs will use the word *cat* only to describe a particularly attractive woman. (СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>)

Similarly, *kitten* (*mače*) is used in English to refer to young sexually attractive women, whereas *pussycats* are reserved for those of gentle and easy-going nature. Speaking of gentleness, a gentle woman will also be seen as *dove* (*golubica*) in the eyes of native speakers of both languages. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>. (Rečnik srpskohrvatskoga književnog jezika (1990). (Drugo fototipsko izdanje. ed., p. 527). (n.d.). Novi Sad. Zagreb.: Matica srpska. Matica Hrvatska.)

A fussy middle-aged woman fond of gossiping is often perceived as *hen* (*kokoška*) within the figurative English language. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>. By contrast, the only entries

the Serbian dictionaries provide for a figurative use of *hen* are the ones of an old and stupid woman. (*Rečnik srpskohrvatskoga književnog jezika* (1990). (Drugo fototipsko izdanje. ed., p. 776). (n.d.). Novi Sad. Zagreb.: Matica srpska. Matica Hrvatska.)

Whereas *goose* (*guska*) is used in English to refer to a silly and stupid person, the same animal, along with *sheep*, is used by Serbs to characterize a stupid and narrow-minded woman. (СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>)

One of the most common domestic animals used in reference to women is *cow* (*krava*). It is used offensively to describe a stupid, disagreeable, and unpleasant woman, both in English and Serbian. *e.g. She's a shameless flirt and might I add, a stupid cow.* (Oxford Dictionaries - Dictionary, Thesaurus, & Grammar. (n.d.). Retrieved October 9, 2015, from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>). (СРПСКИ ЈЕЗИК - речници и алати на вебу. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2015, from <http://www.srpskijezik.com/>).

4. Conclusion

What we may conclude with certainty within the scope of this article is that the

two languages and consequently their cultures are similar only to some extent in their use of domestic animals to refer to humans, with most animal names being used quite differently. Moreover, there are examples of animal names being used metaphorically in one language, with no use in the other. The reason for such striking differences might be the culture itself. Despite certain similarities, domestic animal metaphors used across the two languages tend to be culture specific and heavily influenced by beliefs and values held by the two speech communities.

Also, both languages seem to understand gender and sex differences in terms of animals. Considering the social force metaphors have in people's view of the world, such use of animals serves as a window into the role given to men and women in English and Serbian societies, respectively.

On the basis of the examples of animal metaphors analyzed in this article, it

seems that the choice of domestic animals to refer to men and women across the two languages is not random. In fact, most domestic animals used to refer to men are based on the size (big) and strength (strong) of the animal. By contrast, women are mostly seen as small domestic animals.

The vast majority of the animal metaphors we dealt with are not neutral, but convey rather negative evaluations. It seems that domestic animals are always at hand when it comes to understanding characteristics considered negative and unbecoming to humans. The reason for this, as proposed by Lakoff and Turner, may lie in the *Great Chain of Being* where humans are seen as a higher form of life and as such superior to animals (Lakoff & Turner, 1989). Therefore, if a human is characterized as an animal of some sort, then it is normally degraded to a lower form of life, hence a negative connotation.

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