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ROMANIAN AND ENGLISH FOOD PROVERBS AND IDIOMS: A CONTRASTIVE VIEW

Abstract: The present study is a short exploration of the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural significance of a limited class of proverbs and idioms, those which are thematically or lexically related to food and food stuffs, of a vital nature for human existence and ‘philosophy’ of life. The literal as well as the figurative interpretation of a set of these proverbs and/or idioms is discussed in semantic, lexical and pragmatic terms, with a few ethno-linguistic references to the Romanian paremia and folklore in general. The study may prove useful to paremiologists and linguists alike, if we take into consideration that proverbiality and idiomaticity bear the imprint of a people’s language, cultural history, and cognitive development. This limited selection of the proverbs and idioms of Romanian and (American) English can shed some light on the common and different tastes, priorities, and linguistic idiosyncrasies shared (or not) by the two peoples and cultures.

Keywords: conceptual metaphor, idiomaticity, lexical-conceptual unit, frame semantics, contrastive analysis, phrasal expression, literal vs. figurative meaning, proverbiality, semantic equivalence.

1.1. Methodology and material

In thematic terms, the present article will be a short study of food-denoting proverbs and idioms, in Romanian and English, with a comparative view on the conceptual cognitive characteristics of these proverbs: the contrastive view regards the identical, the similar and the dissimilar image-triggers of the source domains which give rise to a metaphorical mapping into the projected domain so as to mean what some proverbs mean, or evoke, at the figurative level of language. In my present analysis, I relied on a limited corpus of proverbs and idioms that are connected with the basic nutritional elements of ‘food’, in terms of edible stuff, appropriate for normal/healthy human life, such as: bread, water, some basic vegetables, fruits, meat and meat by-products, the common (continental climate-specific) poultry as

well as cattle; all these elements constitute the most frequent lexical items (lexical units) to be found both in idioms and in proverbs, in paremiological cross-linguistic studies. In those cases where a distinction occurs between the source-domain of image triggers in the two languages, the obvious (empirical) conclusion is that the source 'model' of reference and basis for conceptual mapping is different. This indicates different conceptual analogies and metaphorization processes, a different 'prototype effect' (R. Lakoff, 1987: 59-67) in general terms. Therefore, the 'best example' in setting a metaphorical equivalence in the cross-linguistic endeavor can prove most effective, in that it helps us find the categorical status of proverbs within a universal cognitive proverbial 'corpus'.

The present analysis is based mainly on A. Dundes' defining structural observations (cf. A. Dundes, in *Proverbium*, 1975: 961-973), with regard to the type of logical structure of proverbs. Dundes' paremiological theory starts from the assumption that "a proverb appears to be a traditional propositional statement consisting of at least one descriptive element, a descriptive element consisting of a topic and a comment" (cf. A. Dundes, 1994: 59-60). Being basically made of at least one full-fledged sentence, a proverb can include either two descriptive elements or a contrastive, oppositional relation of some kind. Dundes notes that there is 'a continuum from non-opposition to opposition' in the structure of a proverb. Alongside this continuum, there are different scales of opposition or contradiction, exemplified in a variety of proverbs. The food-denoting proverbs may go along the same gradual characterization, in terms of content informational (pragmatic) and semantic structure. Moreover, as Dundes himself notes in his most substantive article on the structure of proverbs (1975, reprinted in 1994: 60-61), such an analysis is quite tentative and needs to be 'tested' with proverb materials from a variety of cultures. In the present paper, I am doing exactly this, in an attempt to exemplify and possibly illustrate the parallelism or differences of certain proverbs related to food in the Romanian and English cultures. This kind of approach has to do more with what has been called ethno-linguistics, as it is connected both with people's language and with their specific way of expressing certain customary, traditional and cultural perceptions about reality. The study is cross-cultural and cross-linguistic as it

looks in parallel into two cultures and two languages at the same time, in an attempt to outline those common and different elements that can lead to relevant conclusions or to further insight into this fascinating field of folklore and proverbiality across countries and languages.

The material (Romanian proverbs and their glosses and the English proverbs related to food) is extracted from a more extensive research project on idiomatic expressions and proverbs in Romanian and English, which are to be collected in a book, the background of which was made possible by a Fulbright scholarship and by the generous, indefatigable support and expertise of professor Wolfgang Mieder, to whom I am forever grateful.

1.2. *The common (most frequent) lexical-conceptual ‘units’ in English and Romanian food-denoting proverbs (and idioms): ethno-lexical food items*

Meals of the day (bread, salt, water); the table as a functional object for food consumption while sitting at table.

The basic elements of reference in Romanian proverbs related to domestic rural life are the three meals of the day, breakfast, lunch, dinner and the table as the central functional object in one’s house. If someone does not respect the custom of sitting at table while eating, there is an idiom which says: someone (because he/she is in a hurry) eats “at the horse’s muzzle”, which means that that person eats while standing, as if standing by a horse (eating quickly in a standing position): *a mânca la botul calului*.

The symbolic elements for hospitality are intrinsically related to food offering, in the form of “**bread and salt**”. Bread is the symbol of everything a human being needs so as to survive, the mere necessity of life, and salt symbolizes the (presumably, ‘good’) taste that food must have for ‘pleasant’ consumption. This symbolic combination of bread-and-salt is an ethno-folkloric token of hospitality in certain parts of south-eastern Europe. The usual saying “*cine aduce pâinea pe masă*” means that the person who is the bread winner in a house is also the head of the family. Bread is a symbolic element in Romanian paremia; as in many other cultures and languages, it is explicitly referred to in the Christian prayer to the Lord. Bread is an essen-

tial food item, therefore, it is most valuable and remains as a focal image-trigger in proverbs such as the short list below:

- *Pe ciobanul fără câine lupii-l lasă fără pâine.* = rhymed: The shepherd with no dog, the wolves will leave him with no bread.
- *Pâine peste pâine nu strică.* = Bread onto bread will bring no harm. (better have more than not enough).
- *Omul bun e ca pâinea cea de grâu.* = The good man is like wheat-made bread.
- *Omul harnic, muncitor, de pâine nu duce dor.* = (rhymed) The hardworking man will never long for bread.
- *Nu uita ziua de mâine, ca să nu duci dorul de pâine.* = Do not forget tomorrow lest you long for bread, i.e. work hard so that you should earn your living.

Bread-and-water is the basic food of the very poor man ('*a se hrăni cu pâine și apă*'='feed (oneself) on bread and water') or it can imply deprivation in a place of confinement (prison) or self-isolation and seclusion (the hermit's life in a monastery), or it can also be the 'dietary' ideal meal for good health. Conversely, the good qualities of bread are metaphorically transferred to the quality of being a 'good' man, by comparison: *Omul bun e ca pâinea cea de grâu* (the good man is like the bread made of wheat). The Romanian proverb that praises bread to the detriment of polenta ("mămăliga") also alludes to the nutritional and economic values of bread, as the essence of quality of life in general. If "mămăliga" is basic to nutrition, bread is its added value: *Mămăliga-i stâlpul casei, pâinea-i cinstea mesei* (Polenta is the pillar of the house, while bread is the 'honor', i.e. The 'corollary' of the table/meal). Another proverb, *Nimic nu e mai scump decât pâinea* (Nothing is more expensive than bread) is an implicit metaphor for good health acquired through good nutritional elements, and which is the most 'costly', as it is vital for all human beings.

Bread is used metaphorically in proverbs which stipulate that one's own homeland is the best to live in, despite adversarial circumstances: *Fie pâinea cât de rea, tot mai bună-i în țara mea* = no matter how bad the bread, it is/tastes better in my homeland, implying "not elsewhere".

But there are alternations with respect to life perspectives: “*Pâinea e bună oriunde, numai pâine să fie*” = “Bread is good anywhere, suffice it to be”, obviously calling for the basic fact in life, food in general, irrespective of where it is obtained. Then the social opposition: rich – poor is also judged in terms of “having or not having bread to eat: “*sătutul nu crede celui flămând*” (“the man who has eaten enough [food], will not understand/believe the hungry man”).

The idiomatic phrase “*A mânca o pâine mai albă*” (“whiter bread”) is a metaphor which reflects the social status of those who can afford a better standard of living in general. On the contrary, “*pâinea neagră*” (‘black bread’) is the symbol of poverty and low social status: “*Pâinea neagră e pâinea săracului*” = black bread is the poorman’s bread.

The ‘derivatives’, “*cozonac*”, “*colac/colaci*”, “*covrigi*”: *cozonac* is a special kind of cake, baked in a ‘canonical form: rectangular, round or oval-shaped cake (baked in different types of usually copper-made moulds), are the ‘specialties’ that are usually prepared and served to members of the family and/or convivial gatherings, on traditional special occasions: Easter, Christmas or on family celebrations and commemorations (weddings, baptisms, and burials). The last lexical item, “*covrigi*”, is part of a very interesting Romanian proverb, which says: “[*Aici*] (*nu*) *umblă câinii cu covrigi în coadă*” (“[Here] dogs walk/do not walk with “croissants’ in their tails”), i.e. a context (cognitive world) where someone believes that in a certain place, region, country, the economic situation of the respective *locus* and, consequently, the social and living conditions in general, are so good, that dogs are wearing ‘*covrigi*’ – a croissant-shaped sort of good quality bread – in their tails, on the basis of the mimetic image: dogs with coiled tails). Therefore, the lexical item “*covrig*” is the image-trigger word or lexical unit that gives rise to the whole metaphorical expression.

The opposite bread item “*păine uscată*” (dried bread, crumbs), *posmeți* (regionalism for “*pesmeți*”), “*posmagi*”, the latter appears in the definite article form, in a proverb, the structure of which is an interrogative (rhetorical) question: “*Muieți îs posmagii?*” (Are the bread crumbs wet, drenched already?). Its connotation is that if such a question is addressed to someone, that interlocutor is supposed to be very lazy, so lazy that he will not even bother to

munch and wet the bread crumbs, as if someone else would have to do that for him.

The extremist idiomatic ‘formula’, in terms of bread “derivatives” is an idiomatic expression (even a collocation), not a proverb, and it reads as follows: “*am mâncat răbdări prăjite*” (We ate fried ‘patiences’ [*sic*]), meaning that we ate nothing, while longing for some food to come. The lexical verb “a răbda” means to wait in eager anticipation for something to happen, to come, while keeping patient. The collocation “răbdări prăjite” is a lexicalized, reversed metaphorizing expression. The expression consists of the lexical transitive verb: a mânca (eat), a DO NP, headed by an abstract noun (‘răbdare’), which is inflected in the plural form (this form never occurs in the plural, as it is a mass noun) and the metaphorizing agreement-marked adjective “prăjite” (fried, pl. fem.); the idea of eating nothing is thus conceptualized, in an “ideal conceptual model” (Lakoff’s ICM) where someone is hungry and has to control themselves to wait while “frying” their yearning. Therefore, the negative metaphor is the basic cognitive element of this expression.

Water. As regards water – as a basic vital element, the following proverbs in the two languages can provide us with interesting cognitive and cultural insights into the perception of the need for water and the way in which people interpret that necessity metaphorically, in their real world and in everyday life:

I. Romanian proverbs and idioms based on the image trigger Apă (‘water’)

- a. *A nu avea (nici) după ce bea apă.* = to have nothing to drink water after: have no food which would call for water to finish the meal in a habitual way), be so poor that not even basic food is available.
- b. *Nu are nici după ce bea apă și el se scobește în măsele.* = He has no food which would call for water to finish the meal, but he still uses toothpicks (as if he had eaten a lot): about someone who is very poor but v. proud too.
- c. *Apa nu-i bună nici în cizme.* = Water is no good even in boots. i.e. about someone who usually drinks wine, not water at the regular meals of the day. (who drinks a lot).

- d. *Din pumni străini nu te sature când bei apă.* = When you drink water from a stranger's fists you will never have enough.
- e. *Face cât trei ape și una, clocotită.* = It is worth as much as three waters [*sic*] and one, which is boiled, meaning it is worth nothing, it is of no value.
- f. *Bea apă rece că te vei răcori.* = Drink cold water and you will cool down (calm down).
- g. *Si apa se gată câteodată.* = Even water runs short sometimes, meaning that some fortune may get spent and exhausted, if it is not renewed.
- h. *A sti în ce apă se scaldă/se adapă* = Literal: know in what kind of waters someone bathes, i.e. to know what someone aims at, what goals to attain.
- i. *A se îmbăta cu apă rece* = literal: get drunk with cold water, i.e. make illusions, make illusionary plans.
- j. *A căra apă cu ciurul* = a strânge puțin câte puțin, a nu avea spor într-o muncă, de obicei, grea. = Carry water by the pail (pail after pail..), i.e. have no efficiency in one's labor, work hard with very little result.
- k. *Dacă nu-i dai omului apă, nu-i da nici de mâncare* = Unless you give a man water, do not give him food either, i.e. grant minimal hospitality to sb., including food and water. One without the other is worth nothing.

The short list above is a limited selection of the most current proverbs that contain the image-trigger 'water' (apa) in the Romanian paremia. Structurally, they are quite varied, for instance, example *b.*, which is an extension of *a.* – is an idiomatic, proverbial saying, based on an emphatic type of negation (*nu are nici*..has not even...) and a consequential sentence (*și el se scobește în măsele*: he uses toothpicks to show he has eaten a lot), with a derogatory meaning. Example *c.* is constructed like *a.* and *b.*, with an emphatic negation, *d.* is a descriptive type of proverb, in the second person singular, with a generic, but familiar, advisory tone. Example *e.* is built on an interrogative pronominal adjective *cât* (=as, quantitative) which

plays the role of a quantifying complementizer and two coordinated nominals, *trei ape* (three waters) and *una clocotită* (one boiled). It is a complete quantitative ‘assessing’ sentence to show the null value of the item compared to water in its different ‘forms’. Examples *e. – j.* are structurally and semantically different in that they must be interpreted in context, figuratively. Example *k.* is also an interesting case where a hypothetical sentence is followed by an imperative mood consequence, expressed in the negative as well, as a logical deduction triggered from the first part of the proverb.

II. English proverbs based on the image trigger ‘water’

- a. *Blood is thicker than water* Rom. equivalent: Sângele apă nu se face.
- b. *Don't make waves (do not cause trouble)* Rom. equiv.: Nu fă valuri (don't make waves)
- c. *Don't throw the baby out with the bath water* (Don't discard something valuable along with something undesirable).
- d. *Don't wash your clothes in public.* Rom equiv. Rufele se spală în familie. (Clothes are washed in the family).
- e. *Gone water does not mill anymore.* You should not pay attention to what is in the past. Let bygones be bygones.
- f. *He is wet behind the ears.* Rom. equiv. E cu cașul la gura. (be very young and inexperienced).
- g. *Plenty of water has passed under the bridge.* So much time passed by.
- h. *Still waters run deep.* The quiet people can be the smartest and wisest. Rom. equiv. Apele liniștite sunt adânci.
- i. *That's water under the bridge.* It is in the past now. Approx. Rom. (toponym) equiv. Multă apă a mai curs pe Dunăre. ‘A lot of water has run in the Danube River’, meaning a lot of time passed).

- j. *The drop that makes a vase overflow.* Something is no longer bearable. Rom. equiv. Picătura care a umplut paharul.
- k. *They are like water and fire/They are like devil and holy water.* These two people are absolutely different/opposed to each other.
- l. *To be in bad waters.* To be in a difficult position.
- m. *To discover warm water.* Something is very obvious.
- n. *To have water up to the throat.* To have few chances to succeed; Also: *Keep one's head above water.* Avoid succumbing to difficulties, usually debt.
- o. *To keep water in one's mouth.* To keep a secret.
- p. *To lose oneself in a glass of water/To drown in a glass of water.* To be easily discouraged.
- q. *To make a hole into the water/To pound water in a mortar.* Making vain attempts.
- r. *To throw water on fire.* To cool down a hot matter.
- s. *To work under water.* Hiding one's real intentions.
- t. *You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink.* You can tell someone something but they will not do it or remember it.
- u. *You draw water to your own mill.* You only act in your own advantage. Rom. equiv. I-a venit apa la moară (Water came to his mill).
- v. *You're a sitting duck.* You're open to danger.
- w. *You're in hot water.* You're in trouble.
- x. *You're walking on thin ice.* You are close to getting in trouble.
- y. *You trouble the water.* You make mischief.

It is obvious that the English and Romanian cognitive and psycho-social 'priorities' related to water reflected in proverbial phrases are different from the cultural (and historical) points of

view, as well as from the folkloric perspective. Where there are equivalent conceptions and proverbial expressions of those conceptions and generalizations, like (1) water – blood metaphorical opposition or (2) deep waters signifying trouble and the unknown, hence, some danger to be avoided, or some other similarities and even identical metaphors, it is understandable that they should be found in both cultures and customary, traditional sayings and proverbs. However, there are also a series of conceptual discrepancies between the two languages epitomized in water-denoting proverbs. One of them regards water as a sign of utmost deprivation (for religious, purification purposes) or as a symbol of sheer poverty. This is to be found in a bunch of Romanian proverbs, together with the opposite metaphor of good health coupled with corporeal and moral purity expressed through water as an element of pristine nature (The Romanian collocation “*apa de izvor*” has this metaphorical interpretation).

The cook, the good meal, conviviality, and wine in Romanian proverbs and idioms

When the members of the family sit around the table, the most important one is the housemaker, who is also the cook of the family. Some proverbs make specific reference to the cook and her qualities: “*Bucătăreasa a făcut bucate bune*” (The cook made good ‘pieces’/meals for the festive dinner).

Wine is the regular festive beverage and is much praised in different proverbs and sayings. In Romanian and in many other languages, wine proverbs evoke some common literal and figurative characteristics related to the effects of drinking wine:

- Wine – changes man’s behavioral profile;
- Wine – a psychological ‘drug’ (wine leads man into oblivion, sleep, and apparent lightheartedness, lack of responsibility);
- Wine and its consumption – leads to poverty, bankruptcy;
- Wine – sign of wealth and plentiful food in one’s home;
- Wine also leads to debauchery, misconduct, if drunk in excess;
- Wine and moderation means living a healthy and wise life.

In terms of structural characteristics, the wine-denoting or connoting proverbs, both the literal and the figurative, metaphorical ones share a few repetitive structures: the identificational, the contrastive or oppositional types, the equational and the multi-descriptive element proverbs. For instance, proverb *a.* in the short list below is a triple-structured aphoristic proverb, where the first part (“*cu vinul și cu somnul*” with wine and sleep) – man will forget his worries and misfortunes, i.e. “*uită grijile omul*”. The description is to be found both in the topic and in the comment part of the proverb. Proverb *b.* is also a descriptive element proverb, but it also contains a contrastive or opposition part, from the logical point of view, since it is not financially sound to sell something that is valuable (*vineyard*) through its potential and buy the end-product (*resins*) of that that is the source of that product. Obviously, this is a sign of mismanagement and bad business. Proverb *c.* stresses the idea that wine is good, but not in excess, and the structure is a contrastive one, with a positive underlying meaning. The opposition is within the pair *vin – minte* (wine – mind/brains); they share the verb, this is the reason why in the commentary part the sentence will have a predicate in the negative form: *bea vinul, dar nu-și bea mintea* ([he] drinks wine but not his brains/minds), they stay sober. Proverb *d.* is rather ambiguous as to its qualities, the more so as it is rhymed, and it could be interpreted as a humorous, slightly irresponsible comment on the nature of wine, as if the person who evokes the proverb were a bit tipsy.

- a. Cu vinul și cu somnul/ Uită grijile omul. = With wine and sleep man will forget his worries.*
- b. Vinde via și cumpără stafide. = He sells out the vineyard and buys resins, Do bad unprofitable business.*
- c. Toată lumea bea vinul, dar nu-și bea mintea.. = Everybody drinks their wine but they do not drink their minds: drink moderately.*
- d. Toarnă vin în două oale/Că nici capul nu mă doare. = Pour wine in two bowls, my head will not ache, about heavy drinkers, still, not drunkards.*

- e. Vinu-i bun, rachiu îmi place/Și parale nu pot face. =
Wine is good, rum I like it/And money I cannot
make/earn/have no ne.*
- f. Bun îi vinul, nu-i ca apa/Nici friptura nu-i ca ceapa.=
Good is wine, it is not like water/nor is roast meat like
onion.*
- g. Bere după vin e un chin, vin după bere e plăcere.= Beer
after wine is torture, while wine after beer is a pleasure.*

According to A. Dundes' classification, proverb *e.* is descriptive-contrastive and oppositional, as it denies in the comment part of the proverb the power of making money as an effect of drinking wine and rum, i.e. spending money on those drinks instead of saving it. Proverb *f.* is also a rhymed proverbial statement, formed of two juxtaposed sentences: the first sentence is a comparison identificational (wine is good, it is not like water), and the second sentence refers to an apparently incongruent part of the proverb, stating that neither is roast beef like onion. The figurative meaning is that real substance, the genuine quality intrinsic to wine and to roast meat cannot be compared to water or onion, the 'humblest' of vegetables.

As expected, the nutritional and pleasurable qualities as well as the abuse of wine-drinking are epitomized in Romanian as well as in many other languages. The second opposition regards the lexical-conceptual pair water – wine, present in the Romanian proverbs, where water is de-valued in favor of the gastronomic 'qualities' of wine. However, there are common traits of wine that are epitomized both by the Romanian and English paremia, such as the tastefulness and the luring nature of wine, its risky impact on sb.'s behavior if consumed in excess, lack of self-control and morality associated with debauchery, etc.

The English wine-related proverbs and their figurative interpretation

(source: Dictionary of American Proverbs, ed. by W. Mieder, S.A. Kingsbury, and K.B. Harder, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

According to A. Dundes' structure of proverbs, the wine-related ones listed below illustrate a variety of forms and structural patterns, hence their meanings are generally perceived to be

conative, or indirectly retrievable from the surface sentential structure.

The first two proverbs, *a.* and *b.*, are imperative advisory proverbs, in which the authoritative tone is obvious and the overall sense is a prescriptive or normative statement, set from an opposing 'posture'. The same interpretation can be given to *e.* and *g.* Proverb *c.* is of an interesting heuristic type, based on a supposition (if wine tells the truth, which is also a proverb, with Latin origins, as is known). Practically, we have to do with a proverb-within-proverb technique of chaining - logically and pragmatically - two different concepts or representations that have already reached proverbial status. In this particular case, the second part of the new proverb refers to two overlapping 'facts': one is that brandy is implicitly known to be much stronger than wine, and the second, deriving from this 'truth', is that brandy 'lies', as opposed to the 'truth' told by wine. The stylistic effect is a funny, heuristically deductive conclusion with a figurative proverbial interpretation. Examples *e.* and *f.* as well as the rest - proverbs from *g.* to *n.* - are identified *in situ*, as to their structure and semantic interpretation.

- a. *Don't pour new wine in old bottles.* Contrastive oppositional
- b. *Drink wine and have the gout. Drink none and have it too.* Contrastive, descriptive
- c. *If wine tells truth, so have said the wise, it makes me laugh to think how brandy lies.* Oppositional, descriptive, heuristic
- d. *In wine there is truth* (Lat. *in vino veritas*). Descriptive, identificational.
- e. *Never spare the parson's wine nor the baker's pudding.* Negative, descriptive, contrastive
- f. *Sweet's the wine, but sour's the payment.* Contrastive, oppositional
- g. *Take counsel in wine, but resolve afterwards, in water.* Oppositional

- h. *The sweetest wine makes the sharpest vinegar.*
Oppositional, descriptive
- i. *When wine is in, wit is out.* Negative, oppositional
- j. *When wine sinks, words swim.* Contrastive, descriptive
- k. *Wine has drowned more men than the sea.* Descriptive
oppositional
- l. *Wine makes all sorts of creatures at the table.*
Descriptive, identificational
- m. *Wine on beer brings good cheer; beer on wine is not so
fine.* Descriptive, contrastive
- n. *Wine, women and songs will get a man wrong.*
Descriptive, identificational

Summing up in thematic and cognitive terms, there is a slight difference of ‘world view’ with respect to the wine proverbs in English and Romanian: with one or maybe two mild exceptions (*c*, *e*, p. 7 above), the Romanian proverbs evoke a rather ‘hedonistic’ conception about life and the pleasure of conviviality, which includes drinking wine, while in the list of English proverbs, almost all the examples above evoke a prohibitive, even punitive ‘view’ on the risks of wine drinking. The last but one proverb (*m*) is semantically equivalent to the Romanian proverb in (*g*). Only proverb (*e*) evokes a different thematic domain, being based on a different metonymical effect: the stereotypical food items to be found with two traditional social classes: the parson and the baker.

Eggs, cheese, bacon/lard: English and Romanian proverbs and idioms

Eggs are not considered to be of the essence in Romanian paremiology, therefore, there are not too many proverbs containing a reference, figurative or not, to this foodstuff. There are a few collocations, related to the traditional manner in which eggs can be cooked (boiled, fried, poached, etc.), but proverbs are even fewer. Some of them are metaphors for human behavior and prejudices, e.g. *Cine fură azi un ou, mâine poate fura un bou* = He who steals an egg today will steal an ox tomorrow. Reference is made here to a tiny food-denoting item, the egg as a

comparative unit of theft, counterposed with the size of an ox, in the proverbial 'source' domain; this reference is purely rhetorical, with an explicit ban on theft in general. The moral precept is the target domain of the metaphorical transfer through figurative language. Another Romanian proverb is: *Invață oul pe gaină* = "The egg will teach the hen", which is reminiscent of the English proverb: *Două ouă când se ciocnesc, unul trebuie să se spargă* = "When two eggs knock each other, one must break". This proverb is a metaphor for two strong wills or temperaments, two people whose wills hit or meet and one must succumb, defeated by the opponent. Again, the egg is viewed as a fragile and tiny item, of not big material importance, unless it symbolizes man's will, when it comes to its hard shell. In Romanian there is a lexical verb, *a cloci*, which is interpreted figuratively, its lexical meaning is "to hatch" in the following sentence: *Clocește el ceva...*, literally: "He is hatching something", i.e. he is doing something secretly.

As distinct from Romanian, the English folklore and idiomatic lexicon consists of more numerous and significant egg-focused proverbs. The metaphorical proverbial phrase: *to have all your eggs in one basket*, meaning to risk everything in one go is most frequent in real speech situations. Other proverbs, such as: *Have egg on one's face* = be caught out (embarrassed); *You can't make an omelette without breaking some eggs* (do something to the detriment of sth. else); *to over-egg the pudding* = exaggerate in trying too hard to do sth. (and finally spoiling it) are a few of the popular proverbs that occur in present-day press comments or public speeches too.

However, the obvious difference in a cross-cultural approach appears to be related to the bread-and-butter concept which is missing in the Romanian proverbial vocabulary. "Bread-and-butter" is a sort of collocation, but it occurs in a proverbial context, with a figurative meaning as well.

A culinary combination of this kind: two elements that through their association symbolize – in the case of bread-and-butter – a certain state of material wealth and good social status, is also to be found in the Romanian proverb thesaurus, but the lexical-idiomatic combination has an opposite figurative meaning; this is *slănină/slană-cu-ceapă* (= bacon/lard-with-onion), in the phrase: *a manca slană cu ceapă* (= eat lard with onion),

which suggests a modest, rural, though healthy – because natural – way of feeding oneself.

As for **cheese** as a basic food item reflected in English and Romanian proverbs and idioms, it seems to be equally appreciated in folklore, for its nutritional qualities. The proverb below is a figurative way of giving good dietary advice:

- Cheese is gold in the morning, silver at noon, and lead at night.

There is no such Romanian equivalent alluding to the healthy way of eating cheese only in the morning, as the English proverb above prescribes. In the same prescriptive manner, the English rhymed proverb ‘*Apple pie without cheese is like a kiss without a squeeze*’ praises the rich tastefulness of cheese as an obligatory ingredient of a good pie.

The idiomatic phrase: *As different as chalk and cheese* is said about two things that are completely different, that have nothing in common. The paremiological dictionaries also list: *No more like than an apple to an oyster* (TTEM, 155b, p. 344). It is interesting to note that for the same concept of dissimilarity, a different phrasing is available, the former relates to the apparent similarity between the two designating lexical items (chalk, cheese), while they are substantially different. The second phrase *no more like an apple to an oyster*, instead, designates two object in the real world that have nothing in common, not even at face value.

In Romanian, ‘*brânză*’ (cheese) as a food item is associated with some wealthy standard of living, in the countryside, where cows and cattle in general represent the farmer’s good ‘fortune’ as it provides him with a wealthy and healthy living standard. When cows are not there, on the farm, this is a sign of poverty and deprivation. However, those who eat cheese without having cows to take the milk from, are squandering and careless people: ‘*Vaci n-avem, brânză mâncăm*’ (we have no cows, but we eat cheese).

Then the following Romanian proverbs are interesting from the cultural point of view, as they all reflect a sort of negative, pessimistic view upon life, on those people whose conduct is reproachable in some way or another or upon poverty as an irreversible social condition:

- *[este] Brânză bună în burduf de câine* = [he is] Good cheese in a dog's belly, meaning that despite his innate (usually) intellectual qualities, he has a bad character.
- *S-a umplut de brânză ca broasca de păr* = He is as filled with cheese as the frog – with hair, meaning he earned nothing (He won nothing, if in a competition)
- *Nu e bun de nicio brânză* = He is good for no cheese, meaning he is good for nothing.
- *S-alege brânza de zer* = Cheese is put aside from (milk) whey, meaning good is sorted (out), separated from the evil'.
- *De-am avea brânză după cum n-avem pâine, bună apă de papară !* = Should we have cheese, as we lack bread, good is water to cook some *papara* (i.e. Engl. 'panada'). This is a Romanian saying which is uttered when in a family all the basic foodstuffs are missing, as they cannot afford getting them.
- *S-a împutit brânza între ei.* = Cheese got rotten and stinking between them, said when friendship or some other good relationship between two people was broken.
- *Frate, frate, dar brânza e pe bani.* = Brother, [yes], brother [are you to me], but cheese is for money (in exchange for money, not free). The meaning is quite transparent, i.e. no matter how good friends, or even close relatives we may be, business is business.

The English Pie and the Romanian plăcintă

From among the cooked food items presented in proverbs, the pie is the most common 'artefact' in the English proverbs:

- *Have a finger in every pie, as easy as (apple) pie.*
- *Too many fingers spoil the pie.*
- *Apple pie and motherhood issue* (American proverb).
- *Clear as the inside of a blueberry pie* (Calif.).
- *To one who has a pie in the oven, you may give him a bit of your cake* (French).
- *Promises, like pie crust are made to be broken* (Latin, in Amer. since 1700).

- *Sweet as apple pie* (English).
- *Better some of a pudding than none of a pie.*
- *Promise someone a pie in the sky* (Amer., meaning to promise a future reward).
- *Giving cold-pie to someone (rudely awaken either with cold water or by pulling off the bedclothes)* (Source: The-saurus of Traditional English Metaphors, P.R. Wilkinson, Routledge, London and New York, 1993).

Maybe one ‘cultural’ explanation for the multitude of pie-proverbs in English and American paremia and even in a variety of collocations could be found in the orderly, tidy and well-‘planned’ setting and laying technique of the pie-making process and the delicious taste of the end-product, epitomizing a ‘perfect’ world, with no faults in it. This ideal world requires one planner, one person making the pie, not several “fingers”, i.e. several cooks. The pie is metaphorized as motherhood in the American culture, e.g. “as American as mom and apple pie”.

In Romanian, a similar, age-old traditional view is conceptually associated with pie-eating and pie enjoyment, e.g.:

- a. *De plăcinte râde gura, de vârzare și mai tare* = Of the pie my mouth laughs, of the cabbage in it, so much the more..., i.e. I am fond of pies, but the contents are even more tasty.
- b. *Cine n-are vara minte, iarna nu mănâncă plăcinte* = He who has no brains in summer (is careless), shall have no pie in winter time.
- c. *La plăcinte înainte, la război înapoi* = Ahead when it comes to pies and [keeping] backwards, when there is war.

However, in Romanian paremia, there are relatively few proverbs or idioms containing the lexical item ‘pie’ as a gastronomical ‘treat’ or a figurative expression of some pleasurable reward for good conduct.

Fish in English proverbs (lexical-grammatical structure and metaphorical meaning)

On the basis of a short corpus of fish-denoting proverbs, we can classify them into the following categories, from the lexical-semantic point of view:

1. Evolutive narrative

Prescriptive eventive-conditional proverbs

Imperative mood; the “didactic” structure

- *Make not the sauce till you have caught the fish.*
- *Venture a small fish to catch a much greater one.*
- *Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime (Chinese proverb).*
- *You need to bait the hook to catch the fish.*
- *If you swear you will catch no fish.*
- *In the morning be first up, and in the evening last to go to bed, for they that sleep catch no fish.*
- *It is ill fishing before the net.*

2. Stagnant narrative

a. Declarative sentenced-based

- *A fish follows the bait.*
- *Fish and visitors smell in three days.*
- *The best fish keep to the bottom (ca. 1566).*

b. Expositive comparative or counter-posed events in proverbs

- *There is better fish in the sea than have ever been caught.*
– longing for what you have not.
- *The fish will soon be caught that nibbles at every bait.*
- *All cats love fish but hate to get their paws wet.*
- *It is at courts as it is in ponds; some fish, some frogs.*
- *It is fish that comes to the net.*

The English proverbs focused on fish contain a variety of metaphors. In proverbs the metaphor "fish and frogs" relates to the variety of human characters to be met in law courts, in parallel with the variety of creatures living in ponds. The negative sense of the metaphor conveyed by "frogs" is transparent enough. This proverb – when and if used in an appropriate context – would sound like an allegorical remark to some interactive social event or situation. The next proverb in the list above is based on an anticipatory *It* Construction that emphasizes (under focus) the rightmost periphery of the sentence: *It is fish that comes to the net*. The post-verbal Subject NP *fish* is focalized by a clefting construction. This is a less common structure in proverbs, as it is rather elaborate, syntactically speaking. Obviously, the semantic interpretation of the proverbs is all the more prominent in the given context.

The Romanian 'case'

A similar classification and description is provided below to the Romanian proverbs, with a view to delineating the contrast in terms of conceptual metaphors and cultural associations in fish-denoting paremia:

1. Expositive, conditional, prescriptive, in the impersonal tone Or ***Declarative, evaluative***: are balta pește [...]

- *Peștele de la cap se-mpute*. (<Lat. *Piscis primum a capite foetet*; Fish stinks from the head first).
- *Cu râma mică se prinde peștele mare*. With the little worm you can catch the big fish.
- *Peștele, ca și musafirii, e bun trei zile*. Fish, like guests, is good only three days.
- *Inoată ca peștele în apă*. He/she swims like a fish in water.
- *Se simte ca peștele pe uscat*. He feels like a fish out of water.
- *Tace ca peștele*. Var. *E mut ca un pește*. He keeps quiet like a fish. Var. He is mute like a fish.

- *Peștele se prinde cu năvodul, omul, cu vorba* (Armenian proverb). Fish is caught with the net, a man, with the word.
- *Are balta pește...* The pond has got a lot of fish. There is plenty of fish in the pond.

In Romanian, the fish proverbs have a comparatively simple structure. The first one is an expositive sentence, with the oblique adverbial, topicalized into an emphatic pre-verbal position: *de la cap* (from the head), while the subject is the lexical NP: *peștele*. It is obvious that the metaphor would be semantically significant exactly for the topicalized part of the sentence, the Source theta-role being the most relevant bit of information for a context where “the head” is easily decoded as the leader of some sort, in a social, political environment. The second proverb is structured similarly, where the contrasting, hence the relevant constituent of the proverb, the Instrument theta-role, is also topicalized in a pre-verbal and pre-subject position: *cu râma mică* (with the small worm). The sentence is based on a cliticized 3rd pers. Middle SE, therefore, the Patient theta-role argument occurs post-verbally, differing from the first sentence, where the Theme (undergoer of the event of going rotten) is positioned pre-verbally. The two verbs are lexically different: *a prinde* (catch) presupposes an Agent (hence, the middle SE construction), while the verb *a se împuși* (stink, go rotten) is unaccusative, therefore, the Theme unique argument occurs post-verbally in a Romance language such as Romanian. The next four proverbs introduce comparative structures: “*ca și musafirii*” (like guests) and “*ca peștele*” (like fish). Some property is apparent in both cases, hence, the comparative adverbials, indicative of similarities as regards the respective properties. Given the terms of comparison (fish – guests; some human being – fish), any of these proverbs may occur as an ironic remark in a given context. The last proverb in the list above has a different structure, where lexical verb gapping (*se prinde = is caught*) occasions a sort of emphatic opposition between the two instrument arguments: “*cu năvodul*” (with the net), “*cu vorba*” (with the word), relating to the Patient arguments, *peștele* (fish) and *omul* (man), respectively.

If we compare the large variety of fish-related proverbs in English with the few that exist in Romanian, it will become obvious that the former derive from a people where fish is a regular dish, if not the national dish, in some way (fish and chips).

2. *Further comparative insights into food paremia*

In connection with Romanian culture and folklore, food-denoting proverbs and gastronomy generally reflect a preference for meat-based ‘specialities’. Even pies are cooked with minced meat as a primary ingredient. This kind of food calls for many spices, combined with all sorts of vegetables (salt, pepper, parsley, coriander, dill, onion, garlic). Most all of these ingredients make up the content of the Romanian proverbs which fall under the thematic field of food in terms of common syntactic structures typical of proverbial or idiomatic language. Similes and metonymic phrasing are most frequent in English, e.g.: *be as cool as a cucumber* (composed, calm), *be nutty as a fruitcake* (=slightly crazy), *be as easy as (apple-)pie* (very easy, elementary), *be pale as a parsnip*, *be fresh as a young head of lettuce*, *be a hot potato* (a controversial, difficult issue), *be a couch potato* (be very lazy). An equally high frequency structure is formed of a lexical transitive verb and its direct internal argument, the direct object: *to know your onions* (know a subject very well, know it thoroughly, be proficient), *spill the beans*, or ditransitive constructions as in: *give someone the onions*.

As to the metaphoric effect of proverbs, the so-called “metaphorical proverbs” (A. Taylor, 1931), below is a short set of examples of American proverbs relating to **fruit, grains and vegetables**, which will serve as a basis of contrastive analysis. Proverbs become metaphorical when they only occur in a “functional context”. For instance, proverb *a.* below can acquire a figurative meaning when it is uttered or used in a situation where some event is a logical and expected result of the precondition of “ripening”, of natural evolution. All the other proverbs in this short list can be interpreted figuratively, in the adequate context of verbal communication and metaphorical motivation (cf. Dobrovolskij & Piirainen, 2005: 84-85).

- a. *The time to pick berries is when they are ripe*
(American).

- b. *Life is but a bowl of cherries* (American).
- c. *One man's strawberries are another man's hives.*
- d. *Stolen cherries are sweetest* (American).
- e. *Eat your melons and don't ask about the melon bed* (American proverb).
- f. *Some of the sweetest berries grow among the sharpest thorns* (Scottish proverb).
- g. *He who is afraid of black berries should stay out of the woods* (Traditional proverb).
- h. *A bird which eats berries can be caught, but not a bird that eats wood* (New Zealander proverb).

The structure of these proverbs is relatively simple: either the predicate is an equative copulative (*a.*, *b.*, *c.*) or an attributive one (as in *d.*) above. Examples *a.* to *d.* are descriptive situational, while *e.-g.* are eventive, oppositional, in Dundes' terms. In *e.*, the structure is more complicated in that the proverb contains two coordinated imperative sentences, the meanings of which are contradictory.

Finally, the examples that follow are proverbs about **corn** and its source benefit, as the basic grain of good and healthy food:

- i. *Out of old fields comes new corn* (English).
- j. *Plow deep while sluggards sleep, and you will have corn to sell and keep* (English).

Example *i.* above is a proverb based on an opposition of 'old' fields (land, soil, earth) and 'new corn' (symbol of the seed, outcome of plowing, as a sign of (re)generation). Example *j.* is a traditional, folk rhymed praise of thorough and timely farming work (land ploughing) as the basic human activity for livelihood and survival. Generally speaking, most proverbs which cover the semantic area of agriculture and fruit growing are prescriptive, highly figurative and normative as regards human conduct, character, morality and individual habits.

The Romanian proverbs with reference to vegetables call for a sort of derogatory or negative interpretation, when used in

functional contexts, where their extended meaning ‘borrows’ from the specific properties of the evoked vegetables: **onion, leek, radish, savory (thyme)**, etc.

Romanian idioms, sayings, proverbs denoting vegetables

- a. *A nu valora/face nici cât o ceapă degerată*: to be worth not even a frozen onion, i.e. value nothing.
- b. *Cu o ridiche și o ceapă nu se face grădină*: With a radish and an onion you cannot have a whole garden.
- c. *E ca cimbrul, în toate*: This/He/She is like savory/thyme, in everything (ab. Someone who gets involved in too many tasks or responsibilities).
- d. *Taie frunză la câini*: He cuts leaves for dogs (does nothing, he is a lazybones).
- e. *De dorul fragilor, mănâncă frunzele*: While longing for raspberry, he eats the leaves (of that plant), living a life of deprivation, in poverty.
- f. *A mânca praz*: To eat leek, i.e. to lie, to say things which are not true.
- g. *Nu mai mănânc, d-ar fi și praz*: I won’t/cannot eat anymore, even if there were leek. It means that sb. cannot eat anything more.

In these examples, only *a.* and *c.* are comparative identificational structures. In *a.* there is a verb gapping, and *b.* contains two coordinated instrument arguments (*cu o ridiche și cu o ceapă*=with a radish and an onion), placed in a topic position and the truistic sentence with a clitic SE+construction V (*a face* = make) and its direct internal argument: *grădina* (garden). Proverb *d.* is a total (opaque) metaphor, in the sense that the literal meaning: “cut leaf for dogs” has no logical justification in the real world, it can only be interpreted metaphorically. Very similar from the conceptual perspective is also the proverb in *e.*, where no one is likely to eat leaves because of lack of fruit, unless in real vital need. Example *g.* is very interesting, because its content (the text of the proverb) is logically valid and it can also be real, in the real world. If someone is too full to eat, that

person would not be able to swallow anything else. Except for what is mentioned afterwards, as an anticlimax, hence, the ironical tone of the proverb. This is a proverb that can be understood and used locally, as it is a humorous remark used by the Southern Romanians (neighbors with the Serbian territory), in the Western part of Romania (Banat). The Romanians know that the Serbs consider leek to be a most valuable vegetable, so, if someone cannot even eat leek, it means he/she really had enough food (cf. I. Zanne, vol. IV: 98).

For none of the above-listed proverbs is there an English equivalent, as these proverbs bear a deep imprint of idiomaticity in the way in which they are structured and in their conceptual evocations. We could say, in line with the Romanian paremiologist P. Ruxandoiu, that they arose from a genetic context. However, many other proverbs related to fruit, for example, especially to the most common fruit, the apple, are generic, in that they stipulate the same gist of wisdom, universal knowledge about the world. For an illustration, below is a parallel between English and Romanian proverbs:

- h. *The mellowest apple has a cawk inside*: nothing on earth is perfect (it has some fault).
- i. *One bad apple spoils the bunch* (German).
- j. *Mărul putred le strică și pe cele bune*: The rotten apple will spoil the good ones.
- k. *Din afară măr frumos și-năuntru – găunos*: Outside it is a beautiful apple, inside it is hollow.

2.1. Cognitive and representational creativity in paremia

Contrary to the general view that proverbs are formulaic in nature, therefore, I consider proverbs to be short, but remarkably well polished examples of ‘prose’ or ‘poetic prose’ (i.e. rhymed cogitations), whereby the ‘voice’ of the proverb expresses its own feelings or perception in relation to the understanding of the world, in its variety and multi-faceted appearance.

Due to their orality and collective representation of the world, proverbs have always been considered paragons of human conduct. They are ethical epitomized precepts and ‘rules’ that had to be learned, accepted and further proclaimed. Their struc-

ture is pre-determined, in the sense that they are conceived in a patterned, fixed model, sometimes with a few variations. Their content is prescriptive and/or evaluative. However, the variety of situations and experiences ('scenes' and 'frames') evoked in proverbs reflects, in general, their lexical and semantic variegated metaphorical interpretation – which is so much the more diverse and inspirational. On the other hand, proverbs and idioms seem to be arbitrary and highly idiosyncratic, because they are so narrowly circumscribed, culturally, cognitively and linguistically.

More specifically, proverbs function like mini-allegories by embodying an abstract truism in concrete imagery drawn from familiar experience; the truism is thus reified and made exceptional or 'un-familiar', while keeping closely to the 'concrete', e.g. *Better a small fish than an empty dish. Big fish are caught in a big river. Big fish are caught with little hooks, etc.*

Over the centuries, food proverbs have been most popular, as most of them were extracted from biblical texts, such as: “*eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye, neither desire thou his dainty meats*” (cf. *Biblehub.com, Proverbs 23:6*). In Europe, during the 16th century, numerous Greek and Latin proverbs were revived thanks to the Dutch humanist Erasmus, who published a collection of three thousand proverbs derived from classical literature, including: “*You are decorating a cooking pot*” (meaning you’re doing needless work, in Romanian, a potentially equivalent idiomatic expression would be: *a tăia frunză la câini* = cut leaves for the dogs), and “*When offered turtle-meat, either eat or don’t eat* (meaning: make up your mind one way or another).

Proverbs about food reflect, naturally, the gastronomic and culinary norms of the culture in which they are produced. For example, the proverb “*from eggs to apples*”, meaning “*from beginning to end*”, originated in ancient Rome, where it was customary to begin a meal with eggs and end it with apples. (cf. *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture, 2003: 160*). In Asian cultures, proverbs abound with references to rice and tea, including such sayings or proverbs as: “*Talk does not cook rice*”, or “*Better to be deprived of food for three days than tea for one*”. In Azerbaijan, many proverbs refer to yogurt and halva, including: “*He who burns his mouth on milk will blow on yogurt when eating it*”. In

Romanian, there is a similar proverb, encouraging to precaution and moderation, but the first edible item is sour soup (*ciorba*): *Cine s-a fript o dată cu ciorbă, suflă și în iaurt* (Literal translation: “He who burnt his lips with sour soup (*ciorba*) once, will blow to cool down even his yogurt”). The English proverb for expressing precaution after a bad experience is: *Once bitten twice shy*. The English metaphor construction and the concise sentential form lack the canonical subject-and-predicate phrases in the ‘well-formed’ English sentence (*Once somebody is bitten he will be twice as shy*), which gives it brevity and prescriptive strength.

2.2. Concluding remarks

Summarizing the distinctive and similar conventional figurative units that are to be found in English and Romanian proverbs and idioms in general related to ‘food’, we list a few below:

- Bread-and-butter vs. bread-and-onion/lard(bacon)-and-onion vs. bread-and-water;
- Have/bring bread (or bacon) on the table (be the bread-winner in a family) vs. *a avea pâinea și cuțitul, a câștiga pâinea* (*traicul*=life, living, earn one’s living);
- Bid sb. ‘welcome’: ‘Make yourself at home/comfortable’ vs. ‘*A primi pe cineva cu pâine și sare*’, = Welcome sb. with bread and salt (as a declarative sign of hospitality, not necessarily followed by the performative act – as part of a custom – of bread-and-salt offering). It is true that in English there is another idiom which is conceptually similar to the Romanian saying, e.g. *break bread with someone*, which implies an invitation that someone (usually a close friend or a close acquaintance) should come to the host’s house and have meal together. The idiom originates in the Biblical texts.
- The apple as a metaphor either for good health or – in its degradation (rotten form) – for negative moral traits in a human being. This metaphor is common in both languages;
- Water as a metaphor evoking the transitoriness of time – in both languages; water as a symbol of poverty and dep-

rivation (Romanian paremia) or as a symbol of emptiness or lack of value as opposed to the ‘value’ of wine. Neither of these symbols are found in the English paremia on water. Instead, water as a sign of purity and life is common to both languages and cultures;

- Within the thematic class of fruit-denoting proverbs, in English or in English-tradition countries (New Zealand), berries are the current fruit in connection with which various generalizations are made (see the examples above). The figurative significance is their rarity. In metaphorical terms, berries represent something that is both precious and difficult to attain.

In the English culture and paremia, the longstanding tradition of eating eggs as a primary culinary item justifies the high number of proverbs related to eggs, for instance: *Don't put all your eggs in one basket*, *As sure as eggs be eggs*, *Better an egg in peace than an ox in war*, *It is hard to shave an egg*, *Who means to have the egg must endure the cackling of the hen*, *Be a bad/good egg* (=be a bad or a good person, morally and temperamentally). Other food proverbs survive by virtue of Shakespeare's works, such as: *to take eggs for money* (meaning to exchange something valuable for something worthless). Still others have been obsolete for centuries in the English language and culture, such as: *to come in with five eggs* (meaning to interrupt with an idle story), while others have been rendered obsolete by changing social conditions, such as inflation: “*as dear as two eggs a penny*”. In Romanian, apart from the well-known proverb: *Cine fură azi un ou, mâine va fura un bou* (He who steals an egg today, will steal an ox tomorrow), there are a few others which make reference to the cackling hen that will not make eggs or to the precaution of counting the chickens after they are hatched, not before: *Găina care cotcodăcește mult, nu face ouă* (the cackling hen will not lay eggs), *Numără puii după ce au ieșit din ouă* (count your chickens after they came out of the hatched eggs). All these egg-referencing proverbs are metaphorical, since once they are contextualized, they will be interpreted figuratively.

What is interesting as a developmental process of language variation and language regularity as well, in terms of cognitive

and linguistic structures, is that some proverbs persist even if they have ceased to make literal sense. For instance, the proverbial phrase “*to eat humble pie*”, meaning “to be forced into asking for apologies in a humiliating manner”, remains a current phrase even though it has been largely forgotten that “humble pie” was originally “umble pie”, and that the umbles were the innards of a deer, often cooked into a kind of meat pastry (cf. *Encyclopedia of Food and Culture*, 2003:159).

As already discussed before, in Romanian traditional customs and culture, **bread and water** and **bread and salt** are the common items of reference which are also present, almost ubiquitously, in proverbs and idioms. These ‘items’ or lexical units which trigger different images in the source domain of some ICM and give rise to metaphors or metonymies in the target domain, in the form of conventional figurative language units (Dobrovolskij & Piirainen, 2005: 39-43), occur either in a constructional unit (bread-and-water, bread-and-salt), or they occur in single word-constructions, as part of the idiom or of the proverbial ‘text’.

The food-denoting proverbs, like all proverbs, in general, have changed their form over time. The early sixteenth century proverb “*Many things fall between the cup and the mouth*” (a Romanian equivalent of which can be: *Nu aduce anul ce-aduce ceasul*, whose literal translation would be: “The hour can bring much more than the year-long duration”) evolved through the mid-nineteenth century, into the more familiar: “*There’s many a slip ‘twixt cup and lip*”. The special rhymed form of such proverbs has a mnemonic function and it also signifies a special status, encrypted into a set form, on account of some stylistic (figurative) device. Other devices include alliteration (*the more crust, the less crumb*), parallelism (*the nearer the bone the sweeter the flesh*), and antimetabole (*while one wastes drink, the drink wastes him*). All these proverbs are dating from the XIVth, XVth and XVIth century, respectively, but in the contemporary age, proverbs continue to be invented, though perhaps not at the high rate at which they occurred centuries ago. Obviously, proverbs are the imprint of the age, social and historical, (multi-)ethnic background where they emerge. This is the reason why the conceptual (cognitive) image-trigger of any such proverb is decisive in identifying the cross-linguistic differences and simi-

larities as regards views upon life and reality. It is in this way that proverbs and idioms re-assess their functionality as real facts of language, i.e. in efficient communication.

As mentioned at the outset, the present article is focused on the cross-semantic equivalences regarding a limited group of food-denoting proverbs and idioms and on their modern pragmatic significance, according to a variety of lexical-conceptual and syntactic features. If we go through these proverbs in both languages, we can notice that these specific features may cause context-dependent interpretations, whether literal or (mainly) figurative. The motivation and accessibility regarding the production and understanding of proverbs, in both languages and cultures, reflect the users' own idiosyncrasies, experiential knowledge, and ethno-linguistic 'taste' or, in other words, the users' cultural literacy (cf. W. Mieder, 1994: 297).

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