

**A CORPUS-BASED STUDY ON SPANISH IDIOMS.  
ON THEIR PRODUCTIVITY, IDENTIFICATION  
AND ENGLISH TRANSLATION**

**ESTUDIO DE CORPUS DE MODISMOS ESPAÑOLES.  
SOBRE SU PRODUCTIVIDAD, IDENTIFICACIÓN Y  
TRADUCCIÓN AL INGLÉS**



**Universidad  
de Huelva**

FACULTAD DE HUMANIDADES

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**ANA MARTÍN BUENO**  
**TUTORA: DÑA. BEATRIZ RODRÍGUEZ ARRIZABALAGA**  
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## **Abstract**

This work focuses on the study of idioms, a universal kind of culture-bound phraseological units with an irregular syntactico-semantic behaviour that, being a real problem for L2 students, have gone, surprisingly enough, almost completely unnoticed in the field of foreign language teaching. Since I firmly believe that idioms, presumably highly recurrent in everyday language, should have an outstanding place in the L2 classroom, I have carried out an exhaustive corpus-based analysis of 94 Spanish idioms belonging to two specific lexical fields —religion and animals— with a three-fold objective: (i) to demonstrate that they have a high frequency of occurrence in the daily production of the native speakers of a given language; to this aim, I have used the variety of Spanish spoken in Spain of the *CREA* corpus; (ii) to analyse the problems that students have to face when trying to identify the idiomatic expressions of the L2 in bilingual dictionaries; and (iii) to investigate the different strategies that should be used to encode the idioms of a language into another one. For these two final objectives, I have checked two general Spanish-English dictionaries and two dictionaries specifically devoted to Spanish and English idioms.

**Keywords:** idiom; institutionalization; semantic non-compositionality; syntactic frozenness.

## **Resumen**

Este trabajo estudia los modismos, unidades fraseológicas universales ligadas a la cultura de las diferentes comunidades lingüísticas con un comportamiento sintáctico-semántico irregular que, pese a constituir un gran problema para los estudiantes de segundas lenguas, han pasado casi por completo desapercibidas en el campo de la Enseñanza de lenguas. Al defender que los modismos, supuestamente muy productivos en la lengua diaria, deberían ocupar un lugar destacado en el aula de lenguas extranjeras, he llevado a cabo un análisis exhaustivo de un corpus de 94 modismos españoles pertenecientes a dos campos semánticos específicos —la religión y los animales— con un objetivos triple: (i) demostrar que los modismos tienen un índice de frecuencia muy elevado en el discurso de los hablantes nativos de una lengua; para ello, he utilizado la sección del *CREA* dedicada a la variedad del español de España; (ii) analizar los problemas que los estudiantes tienen que afrontar cuando intentan identificar los modismos de la lengua extranjera en diccionarios bilingües; e (iii) investigar las diferentes estrategias que deberían utilizarse para codificar en una lengua

los modismos de otra. Para alcanzar estos dos objetivos, he consultado dos diccionarios generales de español-inglés y otros dos dedicados especialmente a las expresiones idiomáticas españolas e inglesas.

**Palabras claves:** modismo; institucionalización; no-composicionalidad semántica; invariabilidad sintáctica.

# I. INTRODUCTION

As it is universally known, the main purpose of language is to enable communication. In general terms, for communication to take place, the users of a language have to know the code that governs that language. There are, however, some exceptional expressions, such as idioms, (1-2), proverbs, (3-4), and collocations, (5-6), among others, subsumed under what is called in the literature phraseological units (cf. Katz and Postal, 1963; Weinreich, 1969; Fraser, 1970; Strässler, 1982; Gibbs and Nayak, 1989; Monroy Casas and Hernández Campoy, 1995), that are quite interesting to study because, being syntactico-semantically irregular, they deviate to different extents from the regular patterns of a given language. Notice, for instance, that in them the language is not used literally since the final message they convey does not derive directly from the sum of the individual meanings each of the words in the expression at issue has:

- (1) To cost an arm and a leg. (Molina Plaza, 2015: 125)
- (2) Hacer de tripas corazón.
- (3) A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. (Zwerling Sugano, 1981: 62)
- (4) Al que madruga, Dios le ayuda.
- (5) Close friend. (Corpas Pastor, 2003: 173-174)
- (6) Éxito rotundo.

The present work focuses, specifically, on the phraseological units commonly referred to as idioms. I have chosen them as the subject matter of my study for two principal reasons: (i) first, because, owing mainly to their irregular syntactico-semantic behaviour, they constitute a particularly problematic linguistic area for students of second languages; idioms are, indeed, difficult to recognize and to understand, due foremost to the unpredictable non-literal meaning they have, and, as a consequence, their encoding into the student's mother tongue becomes a hard task to be successfully fulfilled; (ii) and secondly, because, besides the difficulties their acquisition entail, the

study of idioms in the field of second language teaching has, contrary to expectation, gone almost unnoticed.

Since I intuitively believe that idioms are part of any native speaker's daily speech and should be included, as such, in the teaching curriculum of second language students, the first objective I pursue in this work is to research the real productivity they have in the language. This way, I will have sound arguments to support this initial hypothesis. For this purpose, I have compiled a corpus of 94 Spanish idioms —47 containing words related to religion and 47 with names of animals—, whose frequency of occurrence will be analyzed in the variety of Spanish spoken in Spain belonging to the *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual (CREA)*. The reason why I have chosen the Spanish language as the starting point for my corpus-based analysis is no other than, being my mother tongue, it will help me avoid many of the potential problems that could probably arise, if English were used, in the hard process of recognizing, identifying and understanding this deviant kind of set expressions.

With the intention to help the teaching and acquisition of this particular type of ready-made linguistic units, my second objective in this work is to examine in detail two of the problems, usually pointed out in the literature (cf. Zwerling Sugano, 1981; Núñez Cabezas, 2001, among others), that teachers and learners have to face when idioms come into the second language classroom: on the one hand, their recognition and identification in bilingual dictionaries; and on the other, how to encode them into the second language students' mother tongue. To these specific aims, I have checked four lexicographical sources —two general Spanish-English dictionaries (cf. *the Oxford Spanish-English Dictionary* and *the Spanish-English Collins Dictionary Online*) and two dictionaries particularly devoted to English and Spanish idioms (cf. Domínguez González, Morera Pérez and Ortega Ojeda, 1995; and Seco Reymundo, Andrés Puente and Ramos González, 2004)— to see, first, if the idioms that make up my corpus are present in them or not and, secondly, in the case they are, how they have been identified; this way, some orientation can be given to second language teachers and students so as to look for, identify and understand them in a proper way. On the other hand, basing myself on the different degrees of equivalence postulated in Corpas Pastor (2003), I have studied the different translations offered for them in *the Spanish-English Collins Dictionary Online*, for being the source of the four ones checked where the largest number of the idioms analyzed have been found, in order to establish some

enlightening generalizations about the most common strategies used to transfer these fixed expressions from one language into another.

The structure of the present work is as follows. Apart from this introductory section, which explains the reasons that underlie the choice of idioms as its main focus, the three main objectives that I want to achieve and the methodology I will follow to reach them, this work contains six other sections. In the second one, I present a brief review of the literature that has accounted for the particular behaviour idioms exhibit in any human language, in which three of their universal distinguishing traits are discussed in detail —(i) their institutionalized nature; (ii) their semantic non-compositionality; and finally, (iii) their syntactic frozenness—, to proceed, later on, with the treatment this specific kind of phraseological units has received in the field of second language teaching. Here, special emphasis will be given to the main problems that the teaching and acquisition of idioms entail; namely, their identification in bilingual dictionaries and their translation. Section 3, of a more practical nature, is devoted, in turn, to present the major findings derived from my corpus-based analysis. In the first of the three parts into which it is divided, I present the results obtained in relation to the real frequency of occurrence the Spanish idioms that conform my corpus have in the section of the *Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual* (CREA) dealing with the variety of Spanish spoken in Spain. Afterwards, the findings concerning the difficulties I have found to identify in the four aforementioned sources the idiomatic expressions of my corpus are discussed. And lastly, some interesting conclusions regarding the translation strategies that should be taken into account when encoding idioms from one language into another are brought to light. All these results are, in short, gathered and summarized in the fourth section of this work, where also some future lines of research, which I have not dealt with in this work for reasons of time and space, are outlined. Sections five and six include two different appendices in which the individual results obtained for each of the idioms that make up my corpus are shown in an extremely detailed way. Though both appendices can be considered quite lengthy at first sight, and somehow optional, I deem their inclusion in my work extremely necessary, and, thus, justified, since they provide sound evidence to support the general findings derived from my corpus-based work, presented in section three. Finally, my study closes with a section that lists the bibliographical sources on which it is based.

## II. THE STUDY OF IDIOMS.

### DEFINITION, PROPERTIES AND PROBLEMS

In the process of communication, words are put together to express ideas, thoughts, feelings and emotions, etc., either as part of free combinations, where there are no other particular syntactico-semantic restrictions, apart from the expected ones that follow the general and regular grammatical rules of a given language, or as part of fixed combinations, such as idioms, (7-8), proverbs, (9-10), and collocations (11-12), among others, which being the subject matter of the scientific discipline known as Phraseology, are also commonly called phraseological units:

(7) Eat like a horse. (Molina Plaza, 2005: 175)

(8) Ver los toros desde la barrera. (Molina Plaza, 2015: 125)

(9) You can lead a horse to water but you can't make them drink. (Molina Plaza, 2005: 175)

(10) A buen entendedor, pocas palabras bastan. (Molina Plaza, 2015: 135)

(11) Horse riding. (Molina Plaza, 2005: 175)

(12) Lluvia torrencial. (Corpas Pastor, 2003: 69)

Although Charles Bally has to be considered, according to Sevilla Muñoz (2012: 17), one of the forefathers of Phraseology for having been the first scholar to use, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the term 'phraseology' to refer to those words that lose part or all the individual meaning they have when used in isolation and acquire a new one when entering a ready-made expression, the scientific discipline known as Phraseology is usually acknowledged in the literature as having originated in the 1950s in the Former Soviet Union thanks to the works by Viktor Vladimirovich Vinogradov,<sup>1</sup> which served as inspiration to lots of researchers in this new area of study and where,

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<sup>1</sup> In Spain this linguistic discipline was mainly developed and promoted by Casares, also in the 1950s (cf. Corpas Pastor, 2001: 21).

according to Corpas Pastor (1996: 11), the greatest part of the phraseological terminology used in the literature nowadays was coined.

From that moment onwards, the interest in phraseology has grown to such a great extent that, over the last three decades mainly, it has been the main focus of regular international conferences and publications intended to promote the research of phraseological units in Europe. Notice in this regard that, after the first international conference on phraseology held in Mannheim (Germany) in 1981—*I Internationalen Phraseologie-Symposium*—, other major international conferences followed, such as, for instance, the *EUROPHRAS 88: Phraséologie Contrastive*, which took place in Strasbourg (France) in 1988 and the *I Conference of EUROPHRAS* held, in turn, in Uppsala (Sweden) in 2000 (cf. Corpas Pastor, 2001: 21-22).<sup>2</sup> Among the most recent publications on idioms, Moon (1998), Glucksberg and McGlone (2001), Gibbs (2010), Holsinger (2013) and Yusifova (2013), just to name a few, can serve as good examples.

The present work focuses, in particular, on the kind of phraseological units illustrated in (13-14) and commonly referred to as idioms in the literature, which, present in all human languages, constitute for Makkai (1978: 418-419), among other scholars, one of the features that differentiate human from animal communication for being “an integral part of every natural language once human language became distinct from animal communication systems”:

(13) Salir por peteneras. (Corpas Pastor, 2003: 314)

(14) To call a spade a spade. (Molina Plaza: 2015: 123)

Though idioms constitute a deeply researched linguistic area of study, having been the subject matter of a vast number of different syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, socio-cultural and psycholinguistic works (cf. Katz and Postal, 1963; Weinreich, 1969; Fraser, 1970; Strässler, 1982; Gibbs and Nayak, 1989; Monroy Casas and Hernández Campoy, 1995), there is not still, as far as I know, a common definition of idioms in the literature, owing mainly, on the one hand, to the blurred boundaries that exist between them and other ready-made expressions, such as proverbs and collocations, among others, and, as a consequence, on the other, to the terminological confusion that has been created around them all. Notwithstanding, I take the following definition provided

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<sup>2</sup> The acronym *Europhras* stands for the name of the *European Society of Phraseology*, founded in Bielefeld (Germany) in 1999 in order to promote the international cooperation among scholars working in the field of phraseology by organizing conferences, held annually since 1988, and publishing their proceedings.

by Crystal (2008: 236) as my starting point because, by presenting a very complete syntactico-semantic description of what idioms are, it has been, and still is, as will be seen in the pages that follow, the main basis for other studies on this particular kind of phraseological units:

A sequence of words which is semantically and often syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit. From a semantic viewpoint, the meanings of the individual words cannot be summed to produce the meaning of the idiomatic expression as a whole. From a syntactic viewpoint, the words often do not permit the usual variability they display in other contexts.

This previous definition by Crystal (2008: 236) reveals, in fact, the five distinguishing features of idioms, to which I will return later, that Fernando and Flavell (1981: 17) summarize as follows:

- (i) The meaning of an idiom is not the result of the compositional function of its constituents.
- (ii) An idiom is a unit that either has a homogenous literal counterpart or at least individual constituents that are literal, though the expression as a whole would not be interpreted literally.
- (iii) Idioms are transformationally deficient in one way or another.
- (iv) Idioms constitute set expression in a given language.
- (v) Idioms are institutionalized.

### **1. Institutionalization:**

The property of institutionalization associated to idioms was first put forward by Roberts (1944: 300), when describing them as “the idiosyncrasy of permutation which a given language exhibits in contradistinction to all other languages or a given period exhibits in contrast to all previous periods”. Something similar is put forward some time later in Fernando and Flavell’s work (1981: 44), where “the institutionalization of idioms” is defined “as the regular association in a speech community of a given signification with a given syntactic unit (a compound, a phrase or a sentence), such that the resulting expression is interpreted non-literally”. Both features are clearly manifest, for instance, in example (15), where the Spanish idiomatic expression *levantar la liebre* cannot be interpreted literally and cannot, thus, be rendered into English as “to raise the

hare”, but, quite on the contrary, with a figurative meaning which implies that “a secret has been revealed, usually unintentionally” and which is, thus, completely absent from the aforementioned English expression:

(15) Le sorprendía que la primera en **levantar la liebre** fuera Bárbara Brisa. Seguro que había habido una filtración. (CREA, Alfonso Rojo, *Matar para vivir*, 2002)

Due to their institutionalized nature, idioms are considered to be culture-bound units that reflect the customs, traditions and different idiosyncrasies of each country. As stated in Valero-Garcés (1997: 33), the contrastive study carried out by Vázquez Marruecos and Ramírez García (1986: 629-634) is very interesting in this regard because it reveals significant idiosyncratic differences between English and Spanish idiomatic expressions, among which the following two ones deserve special attention: (i) in general terms, as seen in (16-17), Spanish prefers idioms related to religion and the philosophy of life, whereas English frequently uses idioms related either to nature and animals or to clothes and the human body, as (18-19) illustrate:

(16) No **es santo de mi devoción**. → He/she’s not my cup of tea. (Valero-Garcés, 1997: 33)

(17) **Caerse con todo el equipo** → To cook one’s goose.

(18) **There isn’t room to swing a cat** → No cabe un alfiler.

(19) **To laugh up one’s sleeve** → Reírse uno para sus adentros.

(ii) and in particular, to convey typical customs and traditions of the country, Spanish resorts to idiomatic expressions with bullfighting images, (20), and English, in turn, to hunting pictures, (21):

(20) **Ver los toros desde la barrera** → To sit on the fence

(21) **To run with the hare and hunt with hounds** → Estar en misa y repicando.

It should be noted at this point, however, that not all idioms are institutionalized to the same extent. Their degree of institutionalization can, thus, be measured out on a scale which directly depends on the number of people who actively use it. As has been highlighted in the literature (cf. Fernando and Flavell, 1981; Rodríguez-Arrizabalaga,

2005), the more people of a specific speech community using an idiom, the more institutionalized it is. As a consequence, a contrast has to be made between those idioms that, like *mover cielo y tierra* in (22), are commonly approved by the native speakers of a particular language, and those ones that, like *dar el pisotón* in (23), for instance, have a more private meaning, thus being part of a specific jargon or slang and accessible only to small groups of people; in this case, to journalism. Being restricted to this particular jargon, its figurative meaning of “being the first newspaper to publish an important story” is probably obscure and opaque for many Spanish speakers that, quite on the contrary, understand and frequently use in any context the idiomatic expression *mover cielo y tierra* to mean that “to achieve something, every possible thing has to be done”:

(22) *Mover cielo y tierra.* (Carbonell Basset, 2004: 128)

(23) *Dar el pisotón.* (Haensch and Omeñaca, 2004: 113)

In any case, no matter the particular degree of institutionalization adscribed to them, in all the idiomatic expressions of a language there is a regular, but unpredictable, association between their particular syntactic form and their given non-figurative meaning. As a consequence, idioms are usually described in the literature as a brief, but very rich and powerful linguistic resource that, used to communicate new and original ideas and thoughts, generally imbued with cultural flavour, exhibit, as Fernando (1978: 341) remarks, “the imaginative powers of the human mind”.

## **2. Semantic non-compositionality:**

It is clear from what has been said up to now that idioms are institutionalized because they have a non-compositional meaning; a feature highlighted by Katz and Postal (1963: 275), when stating that “the essential feature of an idiom is that its full meaning, and more generally the meaning of any sentence containing an idiomatic stretch, is not a compositional function of the meanings of the idiom’s elementary grammatical parts”. In other words, the overall meaning of an idiom, as can be seen in example (24) with the fixed expression *to beat around the bush*, which figuratively means “talking about an issue avoiding getting to the point”, does not derive from the sum of the literal meaning each of its components —“beat” and “bush”— has in isolation:

(24) Stop **beating about the bush!** (Galimberti Jarman and Russell, 1994: 935)

As stated in Gibbs and O'Brien (1990) and Rodríguez-Arrizabalaga (2005), among others, according to the most traditional theories about them, idioms originated as metaphors, but with the passing of time they have lost their original metaphorical sense and have become dead metaphors. As a consequence, their figurative meaning is considered to be in these classical theories completely arbitrary since at the present time there exists no link between the syntactic form the idiom takes and its non-literal meaning. The most recent research carried out on idioms considers, however, that the figurative meaning of an idiomatic expression is the outcome of a historical process. Moreover, basing themselves on Lakoff's (1987: 448) hypothesis that the relation that exists between the form and meaning of an idiom is not only motivated by its primitive meaning, but also by conventional images and conceptual metaphors, this new approach defends that the figurative meaning of an idiomatic expression is far from being completely arbitrary. Therefore, whereas from a traditional perspective there is nothing formally explicit in the English idiom *to spill the beans* illustrated in (25) that justifies its semantic interpretation of "revealing a secret", in these most modern theories its figurative meaning is said to be partially motivated by the conceptual metaphor known as the "conduit metaphor", in which the mind is compared with a container and ideas, in turn, with physical entities:

(25) He must have done something big for you to **spill the beans** about that tattoo. (*Collins, online*)

### **3. Syntactic variability:**

Due to their non-compositional meaning, idioms are said to exhibit, in general terms, an irregular and deviant syntactic behaviour, commonly referred to in the literature as syntactic variability or productivity, that differentiates them from other syntactic patterns in the language with the same structure as them. It should be noticed here, however, that not all idioms present exactly the same syntactic behaviour since, as will be immediately seen, some are syntactically more flexible than others.

According to Gibbs and Nayak (1989: 101), for instance, the syntactic properties of idioms are clearly determined and, as a consequence, dependent on the degree of non-compositionality their meaning entails. To prove their hypothesis, they offer a syntactico-semantic comparison of the idiomatic expressions *pull strings* and *kick the bucket* which leads them to the following conclusion: those idioms whose individual

components, like *pull* and *strings*, contribute somehow to their overall figurative meaning —“exploit connections”—, thus showing a very small degree of semantic non-compositionality, have to be considered productive because they can be syntactically altered without losing their figurative meaning, (26a-26b):<sup>3</sup>

(26a) John was able to **pull strings** to get the job, since he had a lot of contacts in the industry. (Nunberg, Sag and Wasow, 1994: 496)

(26b) **Some strings were pulled** by John to get the job.

Quite on the contrary, however, those idioms, like *kick the bucket*, in which no connection at all can be traced at the present time between the meaning of their individual components —*kick* and *bucket*— and the general figurative meaning entailed by the whole expression —“die”—, for being semantically highly non-compositional, have to be considered syntactically non-productive because, as shown in (27a-27b), they either become ungrammatical or lose their figurative meaning when their syntax is changed:

(27a) John **kicked the bucket**. (Gibbs and Nayak, 1989: 100)

(27b) \***The bucket was kicked** by John.

This two-fold distinction defended by Gibbs and Nayak (1989) had been previously accounted for in much more detail by Fraser (1970: 36-40), who presented a well-known hierarchy of frozenness in which idioms are classified syntactically, according to the number of transformations they can undergo without losing their idiomatic meaning, on the following levels:

L6 – Unrestricted

L5 – Reconstitution

L4 – Extraction

L3 – Permutation

L2 – Insertion

L1 – Adjunction

L0 – Completely Frozen

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<sup>3</sup> Notice here that the verbal and nominal components of this particular idiomatic expressions (*pull* and *strings*) are in a clear syntagmatic relationship with their figurative referents “exploit” (a verb) and “connections” (a noun).

At the very bottom of the scale (L0), Fraser (1970) places those idioms of the type of *trip the light fantastic* which, being completely frozen, cannot undergo any kind of syntactic alteration. They are closely followed by those ones that, like *beat about the bush*, can only be syntactically transformed by means of the operations included under what Fraser (1970) refers to as adjunction, (L1); that is, those operations that allow “the application of the gerundive nominalization transformation” (Fraser, 1970: 37), exemplified, for instance, in (28):

(28) **John’s beating around the bush** really annoyed us.

Those idioms included in Level 2 are, in turn, compatible with the insertion transformation since they permit the inclusion of a new constituent into the idiom. A case in point here is the idiom *read the riot act*, which, as shown in the following examples, continues being grammatical, without losing its figurative meaning of “reprimand”, once the indirect object movement transformation has been applied, (29b):

(29a) John **read the riot act to the class**.

(29b) John **read the class the riot act**.

The syntactic transformation that, according to Fraser (1970: 37), distinguishes L3 is that one that allows the “permutation of two successive constituents of the idiom”; hence, its name. It quite frequently operates, for example, on transitive complex verbs, where the particle can be placed either immediately after the verb (verb-particle-noun phrase) or moved to a post nominal position (verb-noun phrase-particle). Therefore, idioms with verb-particle combinations of the type of *make up somebody’s mind*, that are perfectly compatible with the movement just described, (30a-30b), belong to this third level:

(30a) No one can **make up your mind** for you.

(30b) No one can **make your mind up** for you.

Level 4 includes those idioms which are syntactically compatible with the different transformations that, like the passive, for instance, are subsumed under the operation known as extraction, which consists specifically of taking a particular constituent out from its original position to place it somewhere else in the clause. As illustrated in (31), the idiom *lay down the law* is a good case in point:

(31) **The law was laid down by her father.**

The syntactic transformation of reconstitution that distinguishes Level 5 involves, in turn, the encoding of a particular idiomatic expressions by means of “another constituent structure organization” (Fraser, 1970: 37). It includes, thus, among others, the so-called action nominalization transformation, applied in (32) to *lay down the law*:

(32) **His laying down of the law** to his daughter.

Finally, the least frozen type of idioms would be those that, by permitting any kind of syntactic transformation, would belong to Level 6. It is important to notice here, however, that, according to Fraser (1970), no idiom can be included in this group because this level would permit topicalization operations, such as clefting, which, as illustrated in the ungrammatical example (33), can never operate on idiomatic expressions due to semantic reasons; since the overall figurative interpretation idioms have is not the sum of the individual meaning of each of their components, none of these, as it happens to *the buck* in (33), can be clefted to get emphasis; in the idiomatic expression of which they are part they do not have a specific and particular referent in the extralinguistic world:

(33) **\*It was the buck that Mary passed.**

To finish, it would be noteworthy to mention here that the seven levels of frozenness just described are closely interconnected because, as Fraser (1970: 39) himself remarks:

Any idiom marked as belonging to one level is automatically marked as belonging to any lower level. For example, *pass the buck* is analyzed as belonging to level L5. This indicates that any reconstitution operation will apply acceptably (the action nominalization does so) but also that any other operations lower in the hierarchy are also acceptable on this idiom. Thus, the hierarchy correctly predicts that the extraction operation (passive transformation) and insertion operation (indirect object movement) correctly apply. [...]

#### **4. The study of idioms in the field of second language teaching**

Whereas idioms, a well-known linguistic universal, have been studied in depth from many different theoretical perspectives, they have gone almost unnoticed in the field of Applied Linguistics; in the field of second language teaching, specifically, they

have received very little attention due mainly to their already stated peculiar syntactico-semantic behaviour and, as a consequence, to the translation problems they entail, being culture-bound units, not only for translators, but also for students of second languages. Quoting Baker (1992: 65), these problems can be, in short, summarized as follows:

The main problems that idiomatic and fixed expressions pose in translation relate to two main areas: the ability to recognize and interpret an idiom correctly; and the difficulties involved in rendering the various aspects of meaning that an idiom or a fixed expression conveys into the target language.

For these two reasons mainly, the encoding of the idioms of a language into a different one is commonly acknowledged in the literature as a very complex and difficult issue. Zuluaga (1999: 543), for example, clearly affirms that phraseological units “constituyen un rompezabezas desafiante para el traductor” and, in a similar line of thought, Corpas Pastor (2003: 275) states that “[...] la búsqueda de correspondencias para este tipo de unidades a menudo se convierte en un auténtico reto”.

Moreover, the two problems previously stated are further increased because the correspondence between the phraseological units of two or more different languages is never, as pointed out in Corpas Pastor (2003: 281), a clear-cut issue, but a matter of graduation: “las correspondencias fraseológicas no son caracterizables en términos de blanco o negro: describirlas adecuadamente requiere una extensa gama de grises, cuyas tonalidades varían en función del texto”. The phenomenon known as phraseological equivalence has, thus, to be seen as a graduated scale going from complete functional equivalence to impossible translation, in which Corpas Pastor (2003: 205-209), among other experts, establishes four different degrees of correspondence: (i) total equivalence; (ii) partial equivalence; (iii) non-equivalence; and finally, (iv) apparent equivalence.

The kind of equivalence labelled as total occurs when an idiom in the source language finds as its equivalent in the target language, as shown in (34-35), an idiom with the same denotative and connotative meanings, the same metaphorical transcendence and, also, the same frequency of use:

(34) **Red card** → **Tarjeta roja**. (Corpas Pastor, 2003: 207)

(35) **The black sheep (of the family)** → **La oveja negra (de la familia)**.

Partial equivalence is said to take place, in turn, when the denotative and connotative meanings of an idiomatic expression in the source language are encoded into the target

language in one of the following two ways: (i) either as an idiom, but with a different denotative or connotative meaning, as can be seen in (36); (ii) or simply as a non-idiomatic expression that, as such, lacks the expressive values of the original phraseological unit, as illustrated in (37):

(36) **To pull the wool over someone's eyes** → **Dar gato por liebre.** (Corpas Pastor, 2003: 208)

(37) **A clever dick** → **Un sabelotodo.**

There is non-equivalence when an idiom in the source language does not have any parallel expression in the target language, either for linguistic, cultural or historical reasons, and consequently, has to be encoded into that language by means of a paraphrase that simply conveys the meaning the original idiomatic expression has in the source language:

(38) **Beyond the pale** → “Estar excluido de la buena sociedad, ser un indeseable”. (Corpas Pastor, 2003: 208)

(39) **Ponerse el mundo por montera** → “Not to care what people think”.

Finally, the kind of equivalence catalogued as apparent takes place when there are idioms both in the source and target languages that are formally similar in the internal arrangement of their individual components, but which, however, have a complete different figurative meaning:

(40) **To have one's wires crossed** → ≠ **tener los cables cruzados**  
→ = **sufrir un malentendido.** (Corpas Pastor, 2003: 209)

Due to all the reasons commented up to know, it is not difficult to understand why idiomatic expressions have been, and still are, an almost completely neglected area in the field of second language teaching. Furthermore, when they are taken into consideration in the foreign language classroom, they are treated in a very chaotic way which does not help students identify and understand them properly. The studies carried out by Zwerling Sugano (1981) and Núñez Cabezas (2001), among others, are quite revealing in this regard. After analysing ten beginning and intermediate textbooks of Spanish as a foreign language (cf. Zwerling Sugano, 1981) and 20 publications dealing

with the teaching of Spanish as a second language (cf. Núñez Cabezas, 2001), respectively, these two scholars obtain very similar findings that lead them both to conclude that the materials under review are deficient in the following ways: (i) in them the presence of idioms is, first, completely marginal, ranging from three to seven per chapter, depending on the textbook analysed, and, secondly, arbitrary since there is no criterion underlying their selection. In fact, they do not follow any logical sequence and, usually, are not related to the contents of the different units in which they are included; (ii) in them idioms are treated in a very strange way, usually left unexemplified and separated from the rest of the lexical units that conform the vocabulary which the students should manage; and finally (iii) they are scarcely present in the practical activities included in the sources analyzed which, moreover, are described as highly repetitive and with a complete lack of originality.

In order to overcome these deficiencies, as well as the problems which idiomatic expressions pose for foreign language learners and teachers, previously outlined, Zwerling Sugano (1981: 61) provides, on the one hand, a contrastive analysis of several Spanish and English idioms and, on the other, a program for the inclusion of idiomatic expressions into the first years of language instruction since she firmly believes that “there is a need for a systematic integration of idiomatic expressions into the teaching of Spanish”.

### **III. CORPUS ANALYSIS.**

## **DESCRIPTION AND RESULTS**

Due to time and space limitations, I have restricted my corpus analysis to just two specific semantic fields of Spanish where idiomatic expressions, as stated in Boers and Stengers (2008), frequently occur: namely, those related to religion and animals. I have decided to base my study on Spanish idiomatic expressions, instead of on English ones, because their previously described irregular and deviant syntactico-semantic behaviour makes their recognition, identification, and understanding extremely difficult for the non-native speaker of a language. This way I will avoid many of the potential difficulties that would probably arise, if the idioms chosen for my analysis were originally encoded into English.

As can be seen in Appendix I, my corpus consists, specifically, of 47 idioms containing lexical items related to religion and 47 idioms that name different animals. They all, without exception, have been extracted from the two following sources: (i) *El español idiomático: frases y modismos del español* by Domínguez González, Morera Pérez and Ortega Ojeda (1995); and (ii) *Diccionario fraseológico documentado del español actual: locuciones y modismos españoles* by Seco Reymundo, Andrés Puente and Ramos González (2004).

#### **1. On the real productivity of idiomatic expressions in the language**

As stated in the introductory section of this work, my initial hypothesis is that idioms, being part of everyday language, should be included in the second language classroom, where their presence nowadays has proved to be quite marginal (cf. Zwerling Sugano, 1981; Núñez Cabezas, 2001). To support my hypothesis with sound arguments about the true productivity that idioms have in the real speech produced by the speakers of a language, I have analyzed the real frequency of occurrence of the

idiomatic expressions that make up my corpus in the variety of Spanish spoken in Spain of the *CREA* corpus.<sup>4</sup>

In an attempt to collect all the possible forms and variations these idioms may show, when the idiomatic expression at issue contains a verb, like, for instance, *no saber de la misa la mitad* and *coger el toro por los cuernos*, I have looked for shortened versions of them. In these cases, the verbal component has been excluded from my search with the intention to find, on the one hand, all the inflected forms that the prototypical verb heading the idiomatic expression may exhibit in the corpus and, on the other, the possible lexical variations in the verbal slot that the whole idiomatic expression may offer. Notice at this point, for example, that the prototypical verb *coger* in the idiom *coger el toro por los cuernos* can frequently be interchanged with *tomar* or even *agarrar*. If the idiom looked for does not contain, in turn, any verbal element, as it happens in *conejillo de Indias* or *alma en pena*, for example, they have been searched for in their complete form.

Once the corpus has produced the concordances for each search, they have been analyzed in detail so as to discard those linguistic units that cannot be considered idiomatic because they have a literal meaning. Then, after having done this previous selection, in which only the linguistic expressions under review classified as idiomatic have been compiled, they have been categorized, as can be seen in tables 1 and 2, according to the main headword that appears in them. There have been, however, some idioms of the type of *como el perro y el gato* difficult to classify because they contain more than one headword.

The number of idiomatic expressions under study related to religion, distributed according to the main headwords indicated in Table 1, amounts to 1,092 instances:<sup>5</sup>

Headwords	Overall frequency
Dios	264
Fe	260
Alma	102

<sup>4</sup> The *CREA* corpus is the Spanish databank developed by the Spanish Royal Academy that covers the period between 1975 and 2004 and is composed of more than 160 million forms coming from a wide variety of written (90%) and oral (10%) sources from many different Spanish-speaking countries.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noticed here that the total number of occurrences included in Table 1 surpasses the figure mentioned in the text (1,092, specifically). However, this should not strike the reader as surprising because those idioms with more than one headword and, consequently, difficult to classify have been counted more than once. For the final number of attestations gathered, they have been counted just once, instead.

Cielo	79
Gloria	75
Santo	75
Diablo	53
Rogar	52
Religiosamente	40
Rosario	39
Comulgar	25
Cristiano	25
Juicio final	20
Pan y vino	20
Cristo	15
Infierno	12
Muerto	8
Misa	6
Adán	4
Señor	2
Dolorosa	1
Pecado y penitencia	0
Teología	0

Table 1. Overall frequency of occurrence of idioms related to religion

As can be seen in the previous table, the 9 idioms containing the word *Dios* —(i) *como Dios manda*; (ii) *Dios y ayuda*; (iii) *no tener perdón de Dios*; (iv) *sin encomendarse a Dios ni al diablo*; (v) *a la buena de Dios*; (vi) *alma de Dios*; (vii) *(estar) dejado de la mano de Dios*; (viii) *armar(se) la de Dios es Cristo*; and finally, (ix) *como Dios le da a alguien a entender* — are the most numerous ones, with a total frequency of 264 occurrences. Of them all, *como Dios manda* seems to be the most recurrent one, having been attested in 164 instances and followed at a very far distance by *Dios y ayuda*, found, in turn, in 21 different examples:

(41) ¿Por qué no vienen a la cocina y desayunamos **como Dios manda**? (CREA, Alicia Giménez Bartlett, *Serpientes en el paraíso. El nuevo caso de Petra Delicado*, 2002)

(42) Costó **Dios y ayuda**, horas enteras, reparar el deterioro y poner de nuevo el vehículo en marcha. (CREA, Carlos Rojas, *El ingenioso hidalgo y poeta Federico García Lorca asciende a los infiernos*, 1980)

In the second place, we find the group of idioms containing the word *fe*, attested, in turn, in 260 instances. However, contrary to the previous group, this one consists of

just one idiom that appears in two different forms: *de buena/mala fe*. The former is, by far, more recurrent in the *CREA* corpus than the latter (215 instances versus 45 occurrences), due probably to the positive connotations that underlie the lexical item *fe*, even out of context:

(43) Ahora, la nueva sentencia rechaza la existencia de todos los delitos y señala que todos los "costeros" actuaron siempre **de buena fe**. (*CREA*, prensa, *La Vanguardia*, 20/10/1994)

(44) Podría haber alguien interesado en producir duplicidades para que se anulasen delegaciones, obrando **de mala fe**. (*CREA*, prensa, *El Diario Vasco*, 13/03/2001)

The next group of idiomatic expressions attested in the corpus, according to its frequency of occurrence, contains *alma* as their main headword. The 102 examples found within it are distributed as follows: 72 instances with the idiom *alma en pena*, which is the most recurrent one in the group; then, far at a distance, the idiomatic expression *como alma que lleva el diablo* has been located on 19 occasions and, finally, the 11 remaining attestations are ascribed to *alma de Dios*:

(45) No se casó y anda por el mundo como **alma en pena**. (*CREA*, Soledad Puértolas, *Queda la noche*, 1989)

(46) Ni que decir tiene que cuando éste le vio desarmado aprovechó la circunstancia para salir de la casa **como alma que lleva el diablo**. (*CREA*, Luis Jiménez de Diego, *Memorias de un médico de urgencias*, 2002)

(47) No le hagas caso, Carlitos. Cuando está borracho no sabe lo que dice, pero es un **alma de Dios**. (*CREA*, Fernando Fernán Gómez, *El viaje a ninguna parte*, 1985)

The following most productive class comprises those idioms having *cielo*, in turn, as their main word; in particular, 79 examples have been found, distributed among just three idiomatic expressions: *clamar [algo] al cielo*, located in 44 attestations; *írsele a alguien el santo al cielo* with an overall frequency of 30 occurrences; and finally, *como caído del cielo*, attested in the 5 remaining instances:

(48) También se cometen en ocasiones fechorías horribles que **claman al cielo**, o imprudencias que pueden poner vidas en peligro. (CREA, José Luis González de Rivera, *El maltrato psicológico*, 2002)

(49) Disculpad, es que **se me ha ido el santo al cielo**. (CREA, oral, TVE 1, *¿Pero esto qué es?*, 05/03/90)

(50) No, pero ha sido por la llegada de Berizzo que ha **venido como caído del cielo**. (CREA, prensa, *Faro de Vigo*, 05/04/2001)

Quite similar are the results obtained for the idioms with the headwords *santo* and *gloria*, both of them with an overall frequency of 75 occurrences. However, those with *gloria* should be considered more productive and recurrent because the 75 attestations found are shared out among only three idiomatic expressions: *en la gloria*, found on 34 occasions, *saber algo a Gloria* attested in 29 examples and, finally, *cubrirse de gloria*, exemplified 12 times:

(51) Me sentía **en la gloria** porque aquello me liberaba de la espantosa rutina de una disciplina estrechísima siempre en fila, con horarios severos, sin poder moverte de donde te tocaba. (CREA, Lluís Llongueras, *Llongueras tal cual. Anécdotas y recuerdos de una vida*, 2001)

(52) A los asturianos, que jugaron 87 minutos en inferioridad, el empate **les supo a gloria**. (CREA, prensa, *La Razón*, 21/01/2002)

(53) Juan José Hidalgo **se cubrió de gloria** el día que decidió destituir a Juan Manuel Lillo para imponer en el banquillo del Salamanca a Jorge D'Alessandro. (CREA, prensa, *El Mundo*, 29/04/1996)

The idiomatic expressions with *santo* as their main headword cover, in turn, 8 different idioms: (i) *írsele a alguien el santo al cielo*; (ii) *ser santo de la devoción de alguien*; (iii) *quedarse para vestir santos*; (iv) *llegar y besar el santo*; (v) *desnudar/desvestir a un santo para vestir a otro*; (vi) *tener el santo de espaldas*; (vii) *tener el santo de cara*; and (viii) *adorar al santo por la peana*. Of them all, *írsele a alguien el santo al cielo* is the most frequent idiom in this group, with 30 attestations, followed by *ser santo de la devoción de alguien* and *quedarse para vestir santos*, found, respectively, in 13 and 11 examples:

(54) Los maestros decían que era un distraído, pero no soñador, sino que **se le iba el santo al cielo** con cualquier minucia. (CREA, Carlos Castilla del Pino, *Introducción a la psiquiatría 2*, 1980)

(55) He de admitir, que **no era santo de mi devoción**, además de por lo ya dicho, porque era una persona tosca y vanidosa. (CREA, Yolanda Arenales, *Desde el Arauco*, 1992)

(56) Has hecho muy bien, hija, aunque la verdad, yo nunca creí que **te quedaras para vestir santos**. (CREA, José María Gironella, *Los hombres lloran solos*, 1986)

The other idiomatic expressions related to religion searched for in my study exhibit, in turn, a lower level of productivity which, as indicated in Table 1, ranges from an overall frequency of 53 occurrences —those with *diablo* as their main headword— to no attestations at all, as is the case of the idioms containing the words *pecado* y *penitencia* and *teología*.

As regards the idioms naming a particular animal, my search has provided a total number of 899 examples, with the distribution shown in Table 2:

Headwords	Overall frequency
Gato	234
Liebre	71
Gallina	70
Conejo	56
Toro	51
Loro	50
Pájaro	48
Cabra	46
Lince	44
Mosca	44
Pez/pescado	42
Perdiz	38
León	33
Perro	25
Burro	23
Bacalao	17
Sardina	14
Tortuga	13
Gallo	11

Oso	11
Ganso	10
Ratón	8
Sapo y culebra	5
Bestia	4
Oveja	4
Grillo	1

Table 2. Overall frequency of occurrence of idioms related to animals

The 9 idioms containing *gato* —(i) *llevarse el gato al agua*; (ii) *dar gato por liebre*; (iii) *haber gato encerrado*; (iv) *buscar tres pies al gato*; (v) *poner el cascabel al gato*; (vi) *jugar al ratón y al gato*; (vii) *como el perro y el gato*; (viii) *como gato panza arriba*; and (ix) *ver menos que un gato de escayola*— are far more numerous than the rest, with an overall frequency of 234 occurrences. Of all of them, the most frequent ones are *llevarse el gato al agua*, found in 72 instances, *dar gato por liebre*, attested in 60 examples, and *haber gato encerrado*, with 46 attestations:

(57) Violeta Urmana **se llevó** al final **el gato al agua** con un éxito apoteósico.

(CREA, prensa, *El País*, 23/02/2004)

(58) Que una ha visto ya mucho para que le **den gato por liebre**, y éste es de los que arañan; no hay más que verlo, la cara de malo que tiene. (CREA, José Luis Alonso de Santos, *La estanquera de Vallecas*, 1981)

(59) Mujer, unos besos de ese calibre ya son la prueba de que ahí **hay gato encerrado**. (CREA, Lola Beccaria, *La luna en Jorge*, 2001)

In terms of their level of frequency, the second most productive class of idioms in this group are the ones with *liebre* as their main headword, whose 71 attestations are distributed as follows: 60 with *dar gato por liebre* and 11 with *levantar la liebre*:

(60) El público es sabio, y no se le puede ni se le debe **dar gato por liebre**, y tú lo intentas. (CREA, José Luis Alegre Cudós, *Locus amoenus*, 1989)

(61) En su programa de la medianoche, Antena 3 **levantaba la liebre**: Maceda, baja definitiva en la selección. (CREA, prensa, *ABC*, 03/06/1986)

These idioms are closely followed by those three including the animal name *gallina*. With an overall frequency as a group of 70 occurrences, *ponérsele a uno la carne de gallina* has been attested in 41 instances, *matar la gallina de los huevos de oro* in 23 and *como gallina en corral ajeno* in the remaining 6 attestations:

(62) Lo comprendo, pero sólo de pensar que te pudiera ocurrir algo, **se me pone la carne de gallina**. (CREA, Ángel Vázquez, *La vida perra de Juanita Narboni*, 1976)

(63) El único freno que existe a su desarrollo es que se encarezcan demasiado los precios y se pueda **matar la gallina de los huevos de oro**. (CREA, prensa, *La Vanguardia*, 30/07/1995)

(64) Estoy seguro de que Rosa pensaba lo mismo que yo: los dos nos sentíamos **como gallina en corral ajeno**. (CREA, Fernando Fernán Gómez, *El viaje a ninguna parte*, 1985)

Less productive seem to be the idiomatic expressions that contain the headword *conejo*, or its variant *conejillo*. Conformed just by the idiom *conejo (o conejillo) de Indias*, its frequency of occurrence should not be considered, however, so low since this single idiom has been found in 56 different examples:

(65) Al mismo tiempo, introdujo el impuesto municipal en Escocia un año antes que en Inglaterra, dando la sensación de que usaba a los escoceses como **conejillos de Indias**. (CREA, prensa, *ABC*, 10/09/1997)

Quite similar are the results concerning the 3 idioms with the animal name *toro*, appearing in 51 examples distributed as follows: 45 instances with the idiomatic expression *coger el toro por los cuernos*, 6 with *pillar el toro a alguien* and no single attestation with *ver(le) los cuernos al toro*:

(66) Ante un acontecimiento tan evidente había que **coger el toro por los cuernos**. (CREA, Antonio Gala, *Los invitados al jardín*, 2002)

(67) De verdad, haga lo que haga siempre **me pilla el toro**. (CREA, Juan Antonio Vallejo-Nágera, *Ante la depresión*, 1987)

The other idiomatic expressions naming different animals looked for in my search show, in turn, a lower level of productivity than that of the ones just described, since, as shown in Table 2, it ranges from an overall frequency of 50 occurrences at most—those with *loro* as their main headword—to one single attestation, as is the case of the idioms with the word *grillo*.

Once these results have been presented, two general conclusions can be drawn: (i) first, that idioms are recurrent and present in everyday language; (ii) and secondly,

that their frequency of occurrence seems to be higher in written texts than in oral speech. Notice in this regard, for instance, that some of the idiomatic expressions that make up my corpus of analysis, as is the case of *haber gato encerrado*, do not appear in oral discourse, but are somehow productive in written texts —specifically, *haber gato encerrado* has been found in 46 written examples—. A deep analysis of the written texts in which the idioms under scrutiny are found, exhaustively indicated in Appendix I, reveals, furthermore, that books are the source where they seem to be more productive. Books are closely followed by newspapers, journals and, finally, by all the kinds of written production subsumed under what in the corpus is labelled as “miscellany”. These findings should be treated, however, with caution because, as explained in footnote number 4, the oral texts of the *CREA* corpus, mainly deriving from the radio and TV, constitute just a 10% of the entire databank, in opposition to the written sources that represent, in turn, the 90% of the total. Thus, in order to support this initial finding with more solid arguments, it would be convenient to analyze the presence of these idioms in a corpus of Spanish exclusively devoted to oral language.

## **2. The identification and presence of idioms in bilingual dictionaries**

As has been stated in the theoretical section of this work, idioms constitute a particularly difficult area of study because, among other reasons, their identification in the different lexicographical sources available nowadays is not an easy task. In order to prove with sound evidence that this is really so, in the following pages I will present the most important results I have obtained after checking if the idioms that conform my corpus of analysis are present in the following two bilingual dictionaries particularly devoted to idioms —(i) *Diccionario conciso de modismos inglés-español/español-inglés* (Sánchez Benedito, 1986); (ii) *Diccionario inglés y español de modismos* (Carbonell Basset, 2004)— and in the two general bilingual dictionaries *Spanish-English/English-Spanish Oxford Dictionary* (Galimberti Jarman and Russell, 1994) and the *Spanish-English Collins Dictionary online*.

Before showing the general findings from this search, I would like to point out that Sanchez Benedito’s dictionary of idioms has a similar arrangement to the one usually provided in general bilingual dictionaries. That is, it is divided into two parts, English-Spanish and Spanish-English, where idioms are classified alphabetically by the words that carry the main meaning within the expressions; namely, what in the previous

section, I have been calling “headword”. Thus, *aquí hay gato encerrado* is found under the lexical item *gato*, where other idioms such as *buscarle tres pies al gato*, *dar gato por liebre*, *llevar el gato al agua*, etc., can also be found. Quite different is, nevertheless, the organization followed by the dictionary compiled by Carbonell Basset (2004). In it the different English and Spanish idiomatic entries, though also classified according to their main headword, are mingled alphabetically into the same section.

Another important issue worth mentioning here is that these two dictionaries were carefully read through from beginning to end in order not to miss any idiom of my corpus. Although most of the idioms looked for were found under the expected headword, when they were not, they were searched for under other of the lexical items contained in the idiomatic expressions. This has been, for instance, the case of *arrimar el ascua a su sardina*, which does not appear under the lemma *sardina*, but, unexpectedly, under *ascua*, and of *ser algo o alguien pájaro de mal agüero*, located under *agüero* and not under *pájaro*. These difficulties to identify the idioms of my corpus have been highly increased in Carbonell Basset’s (2004) work, where some of them have only been found in the translations offered for different English idioms, but never under any of their Spanish components. This has happened, for example, to *estar en la gloria* and *estar al loro*, found, respectively, as the Spanish idiomatic expressions equivalent to the English ones *to be tickled pink* and *to know the score*.

Basing myself on the individual results of this search, which are exhaustively detailed in Appendix II,<sup>6</sup> an important general conclusions can be drawn at this stage; namely, that the recognition and identification of idioms in the lexicographical sources available nowadays becomes, indeed, as expected, a really hard task for second language students due to two main reasons: (i) first, to the heterogeneous and chaotic situation depicted in them which suggests, as seen in Table 3, that the inclusion/exclusion of idiomatic expressions in them seems to be randomly made:

	Dictionaries of idioms		General dictionaries	
	Religion	Animals	Religion	Animals
Not found	57.45%	44.68%	19.15%	23.4%
Found in 1 dictionary	36.17%	25.53%	25.53%	17.02%
Found in 2 dictionaries	6.38%	29.79%	55.32%	59.58%

Table 3. Presence of the selected idioms in the dictionaries consulted

<sup>6</sup> In Appendix II the exact words by which the idioms have been found in the four dictionaries consulted, are written in capital letters between brackets.

(ii) and secondly, to the complete absence of a large number of idioms in the two aforementioned specific bilingual dictionaries of Spanish and English idioms: in particular, more than half of the religious idioms of my corpus (57.45%) and almost half of those related to animals (44.68%). Or put it into different words, to the small proportion of the idiomatic expressions analyzed that has been attested in them: just a 6.38% of the total of the idioms related to religion and a 29.79%, a somehow higher figure, of the total of the idioms with animal names. The presence of the idiomatic expressions that conform my corpus in the two general bilingual dictionaries consulted is, however, and curiously enough, much higher, representing, specifically, a 55.32% of the first group of idioms and a 59.58% of the latter. This means that the number of idioms of which there has been no trace at all in both lexicographical sources diminishes remarkably, amounting just to a 19.15% of the total of the religious idioms and to a 23.4% of the idioms with different animal referents.

### **3. Strategies to encode idioms from one language into another**

At the same time that the idioms that conform my corpus of analysis have been identified in the four lexicographical sources previously listed, the translations provided in them, when found, have been written down in order to analyze, following the different degrees of equivalence distinguished by Corpas Pastor (2003), the diverse strategies used in them to encode the idioms from Spanish into English: namely, total equivalence, partial equivalence and non-equivalence.<sup>7</sup> Given, however, the diversity of translations found in the different dictionaries checked, on the one hand, and the different criteria, if any, used in them to exclude or include the different idiomatic expressions of my corpus, on the other, I will just focus on the translations provided for them in the *Spanish-English Collins Dictionary online*, for being, undoubtedly, the lexicographical source of the four ones employed in my study in which the largest number of the idioms of my corpus has been found; namely, 35 out of the 47 religious idioms and 34 out of the 47 idioms with animal names.

From the exhaustive analysis carried out on the different translations there provided, detailed in an extremely exhaustive way in Appendix II, the following conclusions emerge:

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<sup>7</sup> The kind of correspondence called apparent equivalence has directly been left aside from my analysis because, as explained earlier, it only establishes a structural parallelism among idioms of different languages which, however, are semantically very far apart from one another.

(i) A very small proportion of the Spanish idiomatic expressions under review — only 9 out of 69— has a completely equivalent correspondence in English, identical in form and meaning, which maintains in the target language, as illustrated in (68b-69b), the idiomatic flavour conveyed in the source language, (68a-69a). As such, this kind of equivalence should be the first translation technique looked for in the transference of phraseological units between languages:

(68a) **De buena fe.**

(68b) **In good faith.**

(69a) **Coger el toro por los cuernos.**

(69b) **To take the bull by the horns.**

(ii) Since the previous type of equivalence is extremely difficult to hold between the idiomatic expressions of two or more languages, the second strategy that has to be resorted to is that known as partial equivalence. This way, the idiomatic colour of the primitive phraseological unit is also kept intact in the foreign language, although, as shown in (70a-70b) and (71a-71b), by means of an idiomatic expression which is only semantically, but not formally, similar to the idiom of the source language:

(70a) **Quedarse para vestir santos.**

(70b) **To be left on the shelf.**

(71a) **Estar como gallina en corral ajeno.** (71b) **To be like a fish out of water.**

This particular kind of correspondence, easier to occur and, consequently, much more common, has been found, in fact, in a much higher number of instances; in particular, in 31 attestations. It should be noticed here, notwithstanding, that this particular figure comprises those Spanish-English idioms of the type of (72a-72c) and (73a-73c), for which the bilingual *Collins Dictionary Online* provides two alternative translations: on the one hand, a partially equivalent idiomatic expression, (72b-73c), and a simple paraphrase, (72c-73c):

(72a) **Armar la de Dios es Cristo.**

(72b) **To raise hell.** (Partial equivalence),

(72c) **To cause an almighty row.** (Non-equivalence).

(73a) **Como pez en el agua.**

(73b) **To be in one's element.** (Partial equivalence)

(73c) **To feel completely at home.** (Non-equivalence).

(iii) Going one step further, if a partially equivalent idiomatic expression is not available either in the target language for linguistic, cultural or historical reasons, the

last translation strategy that has to be employed, for implying the complete loss of the idiomaticity pervading the original ready-made expression, is non-equivalence. Found in 29 of the Spanish-English idiomatic pairs examined, it consists just, as seen in (74a-74b) and (75a-75b), of a paraphrase intended to cover only the figurative meaning the primitive idiom has in the source language:

(74a) **Como Dios manda.**

(74b) **Properly, proper.**

(75a) **En menos que canta un gallo.**

(75b) **In an instant, in a flash.**

In the light of the foregoing findings, it must be concluded that only a small part of the idioms of a language have a completely equivalent idiomatic expression in another language; a fact that, joined to the difficulties that must be faced in the hard process of idiomatic recognition and identification, undoubtedly increases the problems idioms pose for second language students.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

After a review of the basic literature on the phraseological units that constitute the subject matter of this work (cf. Katz and Postal, 1963; Weinreich, 1969; Fraser, 1970; Strässler, 1982; Gibbs and Nayak, 1989; Monroy Casas and Hernández Campoy, 1995, among others), idioms can be defined, in general terms, as universal culture-bound linguistic units with an irregular syntactico-semantic behaviour that is the result of the following properties they all share, though to different extents:

- (i) Their non-compositional and figurative interpretation;
- (ii) Their institutionalized nature;
- (iii) And, their syntactic invariability.

These three distinguishing traits of idioms undoubtedly converts them into a very complex linguistic area for second language students, who do have serious problems to identify, understand and encode into their mother tongue the idiomatic expressions of the foreign language. Contrary to expectation, however, the presence of idioms in the foreign language classroom, where I firmly believe, in complete agreement with Zwerling Sugano (1981), they should have an outstanding place, usually goes almost completely unnoticed and, if present, they are treated in a very deficient way (cf. Zwerling Sugano, 1981; Núñez Cabrera, 2002).

With the intention to help the teaching and acquisition of idiomatic expressions, I have carried out a corpus-based analysis of 94 Spanish idiomatic expressions belonging to two specific lexical fields —religion and animals— in three different stages from which the following general findings derive:

(ii) first, I have demonstrated that idioms are, as initially thought, largely present and recurrent in the daily speech of the native speakers of a language, probably because, as Torrents dels Prats (1969: 1) literally states:

El modismo es la alegría del idioma, el color o la sal, o como se le quiera llamar.  
Es la evasión inesperada de la monotonía narrativa, que nos hace más soportable

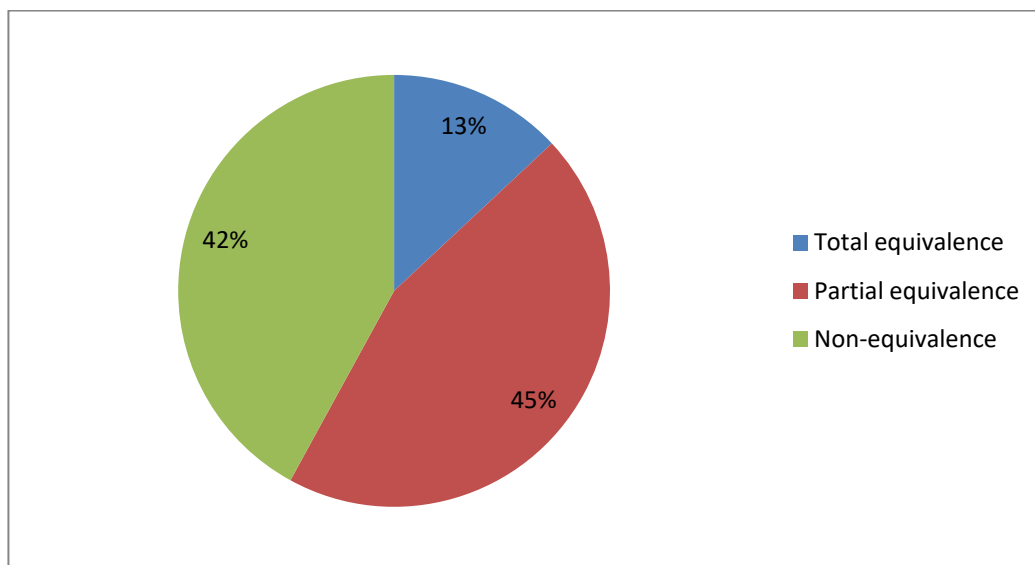
la confianza personal no solicitada o que nos pone inmediatamente en ambiente.

To this aim, I have examined the specific frequency of occurrence the idiomatic expressions that conform my corpus have in the variety of Spanish spoken in Spain of the *CREA* corpus. The results obtained in this particular regard have specifically shown that the Spanish idioms under scrutiny seem to be more productive in written than in oral discourse. Nevertheless, this finding has to be taken into account with caution because, as explained earlier in this work, the oral sources of the *CREA* corpus only represent, in opposition to its written component (90%), the 10% of the entire databank. In order to support this initial conclusion with more solid arguments, it would be highly recommendable as a future line of research to investigate the frequency of occurrence these particular Spanish idioms exhibit in a Spanish corpus devoted just to oral language.

(ii) since the previous results have led me to conclude that idioms should be an essential component in the teaching curriculum of second language students, I have also discussed in detail, with the intention to help overcome them, two of the main problems students must face when idiomatic expressions appear in the foreign language classroom. As regards their identification and location in the different lexicographical sources available nowadays, I have brought to light two important deficiencies specifically observed in the four bilingual dictionaries used in my study: on the one hand, the chaotic and messy organization which they present; and on the other, the absence in them of a huge number of the expressions that make up the idiomatic inventory of a language. In particular, in the two dictionaries specialized in Spanish and English idiomatic expressions consulted there has been no trace of a 57.45% of the religious idioms analyzed and of a 44.68% of those with animal names. Although these figures are much lower in the two general bilingual dictionaries checked (19.15% and 23.4%, respectively), they are still to be considered large numbers which, as such, require some improvement.

(iii) and finally, I have analyzed the different translations of the Spanish idiomatic expressions of my corpus offered in the bilingual *Collins Dictionary online* in order to point out the different strategies which the foreign language student should use to encode a foreign idiomatic expression into his mother tongues. In this final section, I have not only presented the findings derived from this exhaustive analysis, graphically

represented below, but also the logical order second language students should follow in their use of these strategies —(i) total equivalence, if available; (ii) partial equivalence, when the previous strategy fails; (iii) and lastly, and only if the aforementioned techniques do not work, non-equivalence— so as to maintain as accurately as possible in the target language, the student’s mother tongue, the idiomatic colour that these set of ready-made expressions have in the source language:



To finish, I would like to point out two other future lines of research which would also help the teaching and acquisition of foreign idiomatic expressions and which I have not been able to carry out in the present work due to time and space limitations: (i) first, an exhaustive revision of the bilingual lexicographical sources available nowadays in order to correct the deficiencies detected in them; (ii) and secondly, the development of a methodology which, based on the contrastive analysis of the idiomatic expressions of different languages, would point out the most important differences that exist among them, thus easing their understanding.

## V. APPENDIX I

	RELIGION	Frequency of use					
		Total	Books	Newspapers	Journals	Miscellany	Oral
Domínguez González, Moreira Pérez and Ortega Ojeda (1995)	A la buena de Dios	15	12	3	0	0	0
	Como caído del cielo	5	0	3	1	0	1
	Como Dios le da a alguien a entender	2	2	0	0	0	0
	Como Dios manda	164	123	27	3	0	11
	Como el rosario de la aurora	39	22	14	0	1	2
	(Estar) dejado de la mano de Dios	10	7	3	0	0	0
	Hacerse de rogar	52	41	9	1	0	1
	Llamar al pan pan y al vino vino	20	12	8	0	0	0
	No comulgar con ruedas de molino	25	13	11	0	0	1
	No saber/decir de la misa la mitad	6	5	1	0	0	0
	Saber algo a Gloria	29	23	3	0	0	3
Seco Reymundo, Andrés Puente and Ramos González (2004)	Abogado del diablo	15	9	2	1	0	3
	Hecho un Adán (o como un Adán)	4	4	0	0	0	0
	Alma de Dios	11	8	1	1	1	0
	Alma en pena	72	61	9	1	0	1
	Clamar [algo] al cielo	44	20	22	1	0	1
	Armar un Cristo	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Donde Cristo dio las tres voces	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Hecho un Cristo	5	5	0	0	0	0
	Andar suelto el demonio/diablo	0	0	0	0	0	0
	El día del Juicio (final)	20	12	5	2	0	1
	Armar(se) la de Dios es Cristo	9	8	0	0	0	1
	Dios y ayuda	21	15	6	0	0	0
	Como una Dolorosa (o hecho una Dolorosa)	1	1	0	0	0	0
	De buena fe	215	123	80	7	1	4
	Cubrirse de Gloria	12	8	4	0	0	0
	En la gloria (vs estar o encontrarse)	34	27	5	0	0	2
Resucitar a un muerto	8	6	2	0	0	0	
Descansar (o dormir) en la paz del Señor	2	1	1	0	0	0	

	Llevar en el pecado la penitencia	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Pasar las penas del infierno	12	10	1	1	0	0
	No tener perdón de Dios	16	9	6	1	0	0
	Ser de la piel del diablo (o del demonio)	3	3	0	0	0	0
	Pagar (o cumplir) religiosamente	40	17	18	4	0	1
	Adorar al santo por la peana	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Desnudar (o desvestir) (a) un santo para vestir a otro	6	1	4	1	0	0
	Quedarse [una mujer] para vestir santos	11	10	1	0	0	0
	Ser santo de la devoción [de alguien una persona u cosa]	13	9	3	0	0	1
	Tener el santo de cara	2	0	1	0	0	1
	Tener el santo de espaldas	4	1	3	0	0	0
(No) meterse en teologías	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Selected from both books	Como alma que lleva el diablo	19	14	5	0	0	0
	De mala fe	45	21	19	3	0	2
	En cristiano (hablar)	25	17	6	1	1	0
	Írsele a alguien el santo al cielo	30	21	5	0	0	4
	Llegar y besar el santo	8	3	4	1	0	0
	Sin encomendarse (ni) a Dios ni al diablo	16	12	4	0	0	0
<b>ANIMALS</b>							
Domínguez González, Morera Pérez and Ortega Ojeda (1995)	A paso de Tortuga	13	7	6	0	0	0
	Arrimar el ascua a su sardina	14	5	8	1	0	0
	Buscar tres pies al gato	21	15	5	1	0	0
	Coger el toro por los cuernos	45	16	24	1	0	4
	Como gallina en corral ajeno	6	5	0	1	0	0
	Cortar/partir el bacalao	17	9	7	0	0	1
	Estar con la mosca detrás de la oreja	13	8	5	0	0	0
	Matar la gallina de los huevos de oro	23	10	9	2	0	2
	Pillar el toro a alguien	6	2	2	0	0	2
	Poner el cascabel al gato	17	10	7	0	0	0
	Ponersele a uno la carne de gallina	41	29	7	1	0	4
	Por si las moscas	29	21	7	0	0	1
	Ser algo o alguien pájaro de mal agüero	8	6	1	0	0	1
Soltar la mosca	2	1	0	0	1	0	

	Tener alguien la cabeza llena de pájaros	5	5	0	0	0	0
Seco Reymundo, Andrés Puente and Ramos González (2004)	Hecho una bestia (gralm con el v estar)	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Como una bestia (gralm con el v trabajar)	3	2	0	1	0	0
	Conejo (o conejillo) de Indias	56	19	32	5	0	0
	Ver los cuernos al toro (o verse en los cuernos del toro)	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Alzar (o levantar) el gallo	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Ponerse gallito	2	2	0	0	0	0
	Hacer el ganso	10	7	2	1	0	0
	Como gato panza arriba (vs como defenderse o resistir)	4	2	2	0	0	0
	Ver menos que un gato de escayola	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Como una jaula (u olla) de grillos (vs tener o poner)	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Como un león	33	21	12	0	0	0
	Levantar la liebre	11	5	5	1	0	0
	Ser un lince	44	26	13	2	0	3
	Al loro (gralm con el v estar)	50	24	15	1	0	10
	Aburrir (hasta) a las ovejas	4	1	1	0	0	2
	Comer como un pajarito	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Matar dos pájaros de un tiro	35	23	12	0	0	0
	Marear la perdiz	38	11	25	2	0	0
	Como a un perro (vs como matar, tratar o abandonar)	19	17	2	0	0	0
	Como el perro y el gato (vs como estar o llevarse)	6	5	0	0	0	1
	Ahumársele el pescado [a alguien]	2	2	0	0	0	0
	Reírse de los peces de colores	1	1	0	0	0	0
	Vender la piel del oso antes de cazarlo	11	3	7	1	0	0
Jugar al ratón y al gato	8	6	2	0	0	0	
Tragar(se) sapos y culebras	5	4	1	0	0	0	
Selected from both books	Apearce (o bajarse) del burro	23	16	4	1	0	2
	Como pez en el agua	39	12	25	2	0	0
	Dar gato por liebre	60	22	28	3	1	6
	En menos que canta un gallo	8	7	1	0	0	0
	Estar alguien como una cabra	46	37	2	0	0	7
	Haber gato encerrado	46	34	12	0	0	0
	Llevarse el gato al agua	72	19	44	5	0	4

## VI. APPENDIX II

	RELIGION	Presence in dictionaries and translation into English				Type of equivalence (cf. Corpas Pastor, 2003)
		Bilingual dictionaries of idioms		General bilingual dictionaries		
		Sánchez Benedito (1986)	Carbonell Basset (2004)	<i>Diccionario Collins español-inglés (online)</i>	Galimberti Jarman and Russell (1994)	
Domínguez González, Morera Pérez and Ortega Ojeda (1995)	A la buena de Dios	-	haphazardly, in any old way (DIOS)	(= sin esmerarse) any old how (= sin planificar) just like that (DIOS)	any which way, any old how (DIOS)	partial equivalence
	Como caído del cielo	a godsend, providential, manna from Heaven (lit.), an answer to prayer (LLOVIDO)	-	(= inesperado) to come (totally) out of the blue (= muy oportuno) to be a godsend (CIELO)	(= de manera inesperada) out of the blue, (= oportunamente) be heaven-sent, be a godsent (CIELO)	partial equivalence
	Como Dios le da a alguien a entender	-	-	como Dios me dio a entender: as best as I could (DIOS)	-	non-equivalence
	Como Dios manda	-	as should be, proper, fitting, after one's own heart (DIOS)	(con verbo) properly (con sustantivo) proper (DIOS)	real, proper, properly (DIOS)	non-equivalence
	Como el rosario de la aurora	-	-	acabar como el rosario de la aurora o del alba: to end up in confusion, end with everybody falling out (ROSARIO)	acabar como el rosario de la aurora: to end in disaster (ROSARIO)	non-equivalence
	(Estar) dejado de la mano de Dios	-	godforsaken, forgotten (MANO and DIOS)	godforsaken, abandoned to their fate (DIOS)	-	partial equivalence (abandoned to their fate: non-equivalence)
	Hacerse de rogar	-	-	to play hard to get (ROGAR)	to play hard to get (ROGAR)	partial equivalence
	Llamar al pan pan y al vino vino	to call a spade a spade (PAN)	to call a spade, a spade (LLAMAR)	to call a spade a spade (PAN Y VINO)	-	partial equivalence
	No comulgar con ruedas de molino	hacerle comulgar a uno con ruedas de molino: to be gullible (COMULGAR)	-	comulga con ruedas de molino: he'd swallow anything (COMULGAR)	-	non-equivalence
	No saber/decir de la misa la	-	not to know what it's all	not to know anything about it,	no sabe de la misa la mitad:	non-equivalence

	mitad		about (SABER)	not to have a clue (MISA)	he doesn't know the first thing about it, he doesn't know what he's talking about (MISA)	
	Saber algo a Gloria	-	-	to taste heavenly (GLORIA)	to taste delicious/glorious/heavenly (GLORIA)	partial equivalence
Seco Reymundo, Andrés Puente and Ramos González (2004)	Abogado del diablo	-	-	devil's advocate (ABOGADO)	-	total equivalence
	Hecho un Adán (o como un Adán)	-	-	to be terribly shabby (ADÁN)	to look a sight/mess, to look like something the cat dragged in (ADÁN)	non-equivalence
	Alma de Dios	-	-	-	to be kind-hearted, be a kind soul (ALMA)	-
	Alma en pena	-	-	lost soul (ALMA)	como un alma en pena: like a lost soul (ALMA)	partial equivalence
	Clamar [algo] al cielo	-	to cry to heaven (CIELO)	-	it is outrageous, it is a gross injustice (CIELO)	-
	Armar un Cristo	-	-	to raise hell, make an almighty fuss (inf) (CRISTO)	to kick up, create a fuss (CRISTO)	partial equivalence (make an almighty fuss: non-equivalence)
	Donde Cristo dio las tres voces	miles from anywhere, at the end/in the middle of nowhere, at the back of beyond (CRISTO)	in the sticks, in the back of beyond (CRISTO)	in the back of beyond (inf) (CRISTO)	miles away, in the middle of nowhere, in the back of beyond, out in the sticks (CRISTO)	partial equivalence
	Hecho un Cristo	-	-	in a terrible mess (CRISTO)	in a real mess (CRISTO)	non-equivalence
	Andar suelto el demonio/diablo	-	-	-	-	-
	El día del Juicio (final)	-	-	Judgment Day (DÍA)	the Final Judgment (JUICIO)	total equivalence
	Armar(se) la de Dios es Cristo	there will be hell to pay (DIOS)	all hell broke loose, raise Cain, a racket (DIOS)	to raise hell, cause an almighty row (DIOS)	cause a tremendous fuss, cause an almighty row (DIOS)	partial equivalence (cause an almighty row: non-equivalence)
	Dios y ayuda	-	strain every nerve, to spare no effort, big effort (DIOS)	to be a real job (DIOS)	to take a lot of work, to need a lot of help (DIOS)	partial equivalence
	Como una Dolorosa (o hecho	-	-	-	-	-

una Dolorosa)					
De buena fe	-	-	in good faith (FE)	in good faith (FE)	total equivalence
Cubrirse de gloria	-	-	(ironic) to make a fine mess of sth (GLORIA)	cover with glory (GLORIA)	non-equivalence
En la gloria (vs estar o encontrarse)	-	to be tickled pink (TICKLE)	to be in heaven (GLORIA)	aquí se está en la gloria: it is blissful/ heavenly/wonderful in here (GLORIA)	partial equivalence
Resucitar a un muerto	-	-	to hit the spot (inf) (MUERTO)	to hit the spot (MUERTO)	partial equivalence
Descansar (o dormir) en la paz del Señor	-	-	-	-	-
Llevar en el pecado la penitencia	-	-	en el pecado llevas la penitencia: you've made your bed now lie in it (PECADO)	-	partial equivalence
Pasar las penas del infierno	-	-	-	-	-
No tener perdón de Dios	-	to be unforgivable, no excuse (PERDÓN)	-	-	-
Ser de la piel del diablo (o del demonio)	-	-	-	-	-
Pagar (o cumplir) religiosamente	-	keep up with one's payments (PAGAR)	-	-	-
Adorar al santo por la peana	-	-	-	-	-
Desnudar (o desvestir) (a) un santo para vestir a otro	to rob Peter to pay Paul (SANTO)	-	to rob Peter to pay Paul (SANTO)	to rob Peter to pay Paul (SANTO)	partial equivalence
Quedarse [una mujer] para vestir santos	to be on the shelf (arg.) (SANTO)	-	to be left on the shelf (SANTO)	to be left on the shelf (SANTO)	partial equivalence
Ser santo de la devoción [de alguien una persona u cosa]	to be one's cup of tea (SANTO)	-	to be one's cup of tea (SANTO)	no es santo de mi/tu/su devoción: he/she is not my/your/his favorite person (SANTO)	partial equivalence
Tener el santo de cara	-	-	to have the luck of the devil (SANTO)	-	partial equivalence
Tener el santo de espaldas	-	-	to be cursed with bad luck (SANTO)	-	non-equivalence

	(No) meterse en teologías	-	-	-	-	-
Selected from both books	Como alma que lleva el diablo	-	-	-	to run like a bat out of hell, to run hell for leather (ALMA)	-
	De mala fe	-	-	in bad faith (FE)	in bad faith (FE)	total equivalence
	En cristiano (hablar)	-	in plain English (PLAIN)	(= claramente) to talk sense (CRISTIANO)	in Spanish, in plain Spanish/English (CRISTIANO)	non-equivalence
	Írsele a alguien el santo al cielo	to get carried away, to forget oneself (SANTO)	-	se le fue el santo al cielo: he forgot what he was about to say (SANTO)	se me/le fue el santo al cielo: it went right out of my/his head (SANTO)	non-equivalence
	Llegar y besar el santo	to be very easy/as easy as pie/winking, etc. To be short work/the work of a moment (SANTO)	-	to pull it off at the first attempt (SANTO)	fue llegar y besar el santo: it was just handed to me/him on a plate, it just fell into my/his lap (SANTO)	non-equivalence
	Sin encomendarse (ni) a Dios ni al diablo	-	-	without thought for the consequences (DIOS)	-	non-equivalence
	<b>ANIMALS</b>					
Domínguez González, Morera Pérez and Ortega Ojeda (1995)	A paso de Tortuga	at a snail's pace (TORTUGA)	snail's pace (TORTUGA)	at a snail's pace (TORTUGA)	at a snail's pace (PASO)	partial equivalence
	Arrimar el ascua a su sardina	to turn something to one's advantage (AGUA)	-	to look after number one (ASCUA)	to work things to one's own advantage (ASCUA)	partial equivalence
	Buscar tres pies al gato	to split hairs (GATO)	to nitpick, pick holes, to have a bone to pick, to have an ax to grind (GATO)	-	-	-
	Coger el toro por los cuernos	to take the bull by the horns (TORO)	-	to take the bull by the horns (TORO)	to take the bull by the horns (TORO)	total equivalence
	Como gallina en corral ajeno	like a fish out of water, like a lost hen (GALLINA)	-	to be like a fish out of water (GALLINA)	to be/feel like a fish out of water (GALLINA)	partial equivalence
	Cortar/partir el bacalao	-	to call the shots, to cut the cards (BACALAO)	to be the boss, have the final say, run the show (BACALAO)	to be the one who wears the pants/trousers (BACALAO)	non-equivalence
	Estar con la mosca detrás de la oreja	to get hot under the collar (MOSCA)	to be wary (MOSCA)	to smell a rat (inf) (MOSCA)	to be wary, be on one's guard (MOSCA)	partial equivalence

	Matar la gallina de los huevos de oro	to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs (GALLINA)	-	to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs (GALLINA)	to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs (GALLINA)	partial equivalence
	Pillar el toro a alguien	cogerse los dedos, pillarle a uno el toro: to burn one's fingers (DEDOS)	-	-	-	-
	Poner el cascabel al gato	to bell the cat (GATO)	-	-	-	-
	Ponerse a uno la carne de gallina	to go (get) gooseflesh (GALLINA)	to give the creeps (CARNE)	-	to get gooseflesh, goose pimple or goose bumps (CARNE)	-
	Por si las moscas	just in case (MOSCA)	just in case, on the off chance, to be on the safe side (MOSCA)	just in case (MOSCA)	just in case, just to be on the safe side (MOSCA)	non-equivalence
	Ser algo o alguien pájaro de mal agüero	to be a bird of ill omen (PÁJARO)	-	(to be a) bird of ill omen (AGÜERO)	-	total equivalence
	Soltar la mosca	-	-	to fork out (inf), stump up (MOSCA)	-	non-equivalence
	Tener alguien la cabeza llena de pájaros	-	-	to be featherbrained (PÁJARO)	to be dizzy-headed, to be scatterbrained (PÁJARO)	partial equivalence
Seco Reymundo, Andrés Puente and Ramos González (2004)	Hecho una bestia (gralm con el v estar)	-	-	-	-	-
	Como una bestia (gralm con el v trabajar)	-	-	-	-	-
	Conejo (o conejillo) de Indias	a guinea pig (CONEJO)	-	guinea pig (CONEJILLO)	guinea pig (CONEJILLO)	partial equivalence
	Ver los cuernos al toro (o verse en los cuernos del toro)	-	-	-	-	-
	Alzar (o levantar) el gallo	-	-	to bawl (GALLO)	-	non-equivalence
	Ponerse gallito	-	-	to get cocky (GALLITO)	-	total equivalence
	Hacer el ganso	-	-	to play the fool, clown around (GANSO)	to clown around, to goof around (GANSO)	non-equivalence
	Como gato panza arriba (vs como defenderse o resistir)	to fight (defend) tooth and nail (GATO)	-	to fight tooth and nail (to defend o.s.) (DEFENDERSE)	to defend oneself fiercely, tooth and nail (GATO)	partial equivalence
	Ver menos que un gato de	-	-	-	-	-

escayola					
Como una jaula (u olla) de grillos (vs tener o poner)	-	-	-	-	-
Como un león	-	-	ponerse como un león: to be furious, get mad (LEÓN)	-	non-equivalence
Levantarse la liebre	-	-	to blow the gaff (inf), let the cat out of the bag (LIEBRE)	to let the cat out of the bag, to blow the gaff (LIEBRE)	partial equivalence
Ser un lince	-	-	(= observador) to be very sharp-eyed, (= astuto) to be very shrewd o sharp (LINCE)	to be razor-sharp (LINCE)	non-equivalence
Al loro (gram con el v estar)	to be on the ball (LORO)	to know the score (KNOW)	(= alerta) to be on the alert, (= informado) to know the score (inf) (LORO)	(= alerta) to be on one's toes, to be on the ball, to keep one's eyes open, (= informado) to keep up with what's going on (LORO)	non-equivalence
Aburrir (hasta) a las ovejas	-	-	-	-	-
Comer como un pajarito	-	-	-	to eat like a bird (PAJARITO)	-
Matar dos pájaros de un tiro	to kill two birds with one stone (PÁJARO)	to kill two birds with one stone (PÁJARO)	to kill two birds with one stone (PÁJARO)	to kill two birds with one stone (PÁJARO)	partial equivalence
Marear la perdiz	-	-	to mess about (inf) (PERDIZ)	-	non-equivalence
Como a un perro (vs como matar, tratar o abandonar)	-	-	tratar a algn como a un perro: to treat sb like dirt (PERRO)	to abandon sb as a stray dog, to die in abject poverty, to die like a dog (PERRO)	non-equivalence
Como el perro y el gato (vs como estar o llevarse)	to fight like cat and dog (PERRO)	like cat and dog (PERRO)	to fight like cat and dog (PERRO)	to fight like cat and dog (GATO)	total equivalence
Ahumarse el pescado [a alguien]	-	-	-	-	-
Reírse de los peces de colores	-	-	¡me río de los peces de colores!: I couldn't care less! (PEZ)	me río/ se ríe de los peces de colores: I/he couldn't care less (PEZ)	non-equivalence
Vender la piel del oso antes de cazarlo	don't count your chickens before they're hatched (OSO)	-	-	-	-

	Jugar al ratón y al gato	-	-	to play cat and mouse with sb, play a cat-and-mouse game with sb (GATO)	to play cat and mouse (GATO)	total equivalence
	Tragar(se) sapos y culebras	-	-	echar sapos y culebras: to turn the air blue (SAPO)	to grin and bear it (SAPO)	partial equivalence
Selected from both books	Apeararse (o bajarse) del burro	to come down off one's high horse (BURRO)	to get off one's high horse (BURRO)	to back down (BURRO)	to back down (BURRO)	non-equivalence
	Como pez en el agua	as snug as a bug in a rug (PEZ)	-	to feel completely at home, be in one's element (PEZ)	to be in one's element (PEZ)	partial equivalence (to feel completely at home: non-equivalence)
	Dar gato por liebre	to buy (a) pig in a poke (GATO)	to pull the wool over someone's eyes, cheat, gyp (GATO)	te han dado gato por liebre: you've been had o conned (inf), you've been done (inf) (GATO)	pasaron/metieron gato por liebre: you were conned/done (GATO)	non-equivalence
	En menos que canta un gallo	before one can say "Jack Robinson" (arg.) (GALLO)	in a jiffy, like a flash (GALLO)	in an instant, in a flash (GALLO)	in no time at all, in a flash (GALLO)	non-equivalence
	Estar alguien como una cabra	to be as mad as a hatter (CABRA)	mad as a hatter, to have a bee in one's bonnet (MAD and BEE)	to be crazy (CABRA)	to be crazy, to be nuts (CABRA)	non-equivalence
	Haber gato encerrado	to smell a rat, there's something fishy here (GATO)	something fishy, to smell a rat (GATO)	aquí hay gato encerrado: there's something fishy (going on) here (GATO)	aquí hay gato encerrado: there's something fishy going on here (GATO)	non-equivalence
	Llevarse el gato al agua	to bring home the bacon (GATO)	win, make it, bring home the bacon (GATO)	to win the day, pull it off (inf) (GATO)	to pull it off (inf), to succeed (GATO)	partial equivalence (pull it off: non-equivalence)

## VII. REFERENCES

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