

PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS AS A COMPLEX PHENOMENON

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Abstract: *In this article, one can find about that a phraseological unit is complex phenomenon with a number of important features, which can be approached from different points of view. In addition to this, there exist a considerable number of different classification systems devised by different scholars and based on different principles.*

Key words: *linguistics, proverbs, communicative linguistics, sociolinguistics, phraseology, stylistics, extralinguistic character, idioms.*

The traditional and oldest principle for classifying phraseological units is based on their original content and might be alluded to as “thematic”.

The approach is widely used in numerous English and American guides to idioms, phrase books, etc. (see, for instance, English idioms by J.P. Smith¹, London, 1912).

On this principle, idioms are classified according to their sources of origin, “source” referring to the particular sphere of human activity of life, of nature, of natural phenomena, etc. So, J.P. Smith gives in his classification groups of idioms used by sailors, fishermen, soldiers, hunters and associated with the regalia, phenomena and conditions of their occupations. In Smith’s classification we also find groups of idioms associated with domestic and wild animals, agriculture and cooking. There are also numerous idioms drawn from sports, arts, etc.

The principle of classification is sometimes called “etymological”. The term does not seem appropriate since we usually mean something different when we speak of the etymology of a word or word – groups: whether the word (or word – group) is native or borrowed, and if the latter; what is the

source of borrowing. It is true that Smith makes a special study of idioms borrowed from other languages, but that is only a relatively small part of his classification system. Here are some examples, which have no any association with the sea or sailors:

1. “How can I be a judge in a situation in which I’m all at sea?”

2. I’m afraid I’m at sea in this problem;

In deep water – in trouble or danger;

In low water; On the rocks - in strained financial circumstances;

To be in the same boat with somebody – to be in a situation, in which people share the same difficulties and dangers;

To sail under false colors - to pretend to be what one is not – sometimes to pose as a friend, at the same time, have hostile intentions;

To show one's color – to betray one's real character or intentions;

To strike one's color – to surrender, give in admit one is beaten;

To bow the storm – give in, to acknowledge one's defeat;

Three sheets in (to) the wind (sl) - very drunk;

Half seas – over drunk;

Though, as has been said, direct associations with seafaring in all these idioms have been severed distant memories of the sea romance and adventure still linger in some of them.

The thematic principle of classifying phraseological units has real merit but it does not take into consideration the linguistic characteristic features of the phraseological units. The considerable contribution made by Soviet scholars in phraseological research cannot be exaggerated. We have already mentioned the great contribution made by Academician V.V. Vinogradov to this branch of linguistic science.

The classification system of phraseological units devised by this

prominent scholar is considered by some linguists of today to be out dated, and yet its value is beyond doubt because it was the first classification system which was based on the semantic characteristics are of immense importance in phraseological units. It is also well – know that in modern research they are often sadly ignored.

That is why any attempt studying the semantic aspect of phraseological units should be appreciated.

V.V.Vinogradov's¹ classification system is founded on the degree of semantic cohesion between the components on a phraseological unit. Units with partially transferred meaning show the weakest cohesion between their components. The most distant the meaning of its constituent parts the greater is its degree of semantic cohesion. Accordingly, Vinogradov classifies phraseological units into three classes: phraseological combinations, unities and fusions.

To break the ice – the ice is broken, that is verbal word – groups which transformed into a sentence when the verb is used in the Passive Voice;

1. Phraseological units which are neither nominative nor communicative include interjectional word – groups;

2. Communicative phraseological units are represented by proverbs and sayings these for classes are divided into subgroups according to the type of structure of the phraseological unit. The sub – groups include further rubrics, representing types of structural – semantic meanings according to the kind of relations between the constituents and either full of partial transference of meaning.

The classification system includes a considerable number of subtypes and gradations and objectively reflects the wealth of types of phraseological units existing in the language. It is based on truly scientific

and modern criteria and represents an earnest attempt to take into account all the relevant aspects of phraseological unit and combine them within the borders of one classification system. Phraseological units can be classified as parts of speech (syntactical classification). This classification was suggested by I.V. Arnold. Here we have the following groups: Noun phraseologisms denoting an object, a person, a living being:

a) Verb phraseologisms denoting an action, a state, a feeling ; e.g to break the log – jam, to get on smb’s coattails, to be on the beam, to nose out, to make headlines.

b) Adjective phraseologisms denoting a quality, e.g loose as a goose, dull as lead.

c) Adverb phraseological units, such as : with a bump, in the soup, like a dream, like a dog with two tails.

d) Preposition phraseological units, e.g in the course of, on the stroke of.

e) Interjection phraseological units, e.g “ Catch me!”, “Well, I never!” etc.

In I.V. Arnold⁸’s classification there are also sentence equivalents, proverbs, sayings and quotation, e.g “ The sky is the limit”, “ What makes him tick”, “ I am easy”. Proverbs are usually metaphorical, e.g “ Too many cooks spoil the broth”, while sayings are as a rule non – metaphorical, e.g “ Where there is a will there is a way”.

1. Set expressions functioning like nouns (noun phraseologisms):

N+N: maiden name “ the surname of a woman before she was married”, brains trust “ a committee of experts” or “a number of reputedly well–informed persons chosen to answer questions of general interest without preparation”.

N’s+N: cat’s paw “one who is used for the convenience of a cleverer and stronger person” (the expression comes from a fable in which a monk wanting to eat some chestnuts that were on a hot stove, but not wishing to burn himself while getting them, seized a cat and holding its paw in his own used it to knock the chestnuts to the ground); Hobson’s choice, a set expression used when there is no choice at all, when a person has to take what is offered or nothing (Thomas Hobson, a 17th century London stableman, made every person hiring horses take the next in order) .

There is one more type of combinations , also rigid and introduced into discourse ready – made but different from all the types given above in so far as it’s impossible to find its equivalent among the parts of speech. These are

1. ⁸ I. V. Arnold “ The English word ” M - 1986

formulas used as complete utterances, and syntactically shaped like sentences, such as the well – known American maxim Keep smiling! or British Keep Britain tidy.

A.I. Smirnitsky was the first among Russian scholars who paid attention to sentences that can be treated as complete formulas, such as “How do you do?” or “I beg you pardon”; “It takes all kinds to make the world”; “Can the leopard change his spots?” They differ from all the combinations so far discussed because they are not equivalent to words in distribution and are semantically analyzable. The formulas discussed by N.N. Amasova are on the contrary semantically specific, e.g “ save your breath ”, “ shut up ” or “ tell it to the marines ” (one of the suggested origins are tell that to the horse marines; such a corps being non – existent, as marines are sea – going force, the last expression means tell it to someone who does not exist, because people will not believe it) very often such formulas , formally identical to sentences, are in reality used only as insertions into other sentences: the cap fits “ the statement is true ” (e. g “ He called me a liar ” – “ Well, you should know if the cup fits”) cf. also: Butter would not melt in his mouth; His bark is worse than his bite.

And one more point : free word combinations can never be polysemantic, while there are polysemantic phraseological units, e. g. to be on the go –

1. To be busy and active
2. To be leaving
3. To be tipsy
4. To be near one’s end

Have done with –

1. Make an end of
2. Give up
3. Reach the end of

Two types of synonymy are typical of phraseological units: 1. Synonymy of phraseological units that do not contain any synonymous words and are based on different images, e. g. to leave no stone unturned = to move heaven and earth.

To haul down colors = to ground arms. In free word combinations synonymy is based on the synonymy of particular words (an old man = elderly man).

2 Phraseological units have word synonyms:

- To make up one’s mind = to decide;
- To haul down colours = to surrender.

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