

Phraseology as an Independent Branch of Linguistics

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Abstract: *This article discusses the section of linguistics phraseology namely idioms as analysis. Its meaning should be traced using the method of compositional analysis. This method helps you detect meaning when necessary. In General, phraseological units, even if they represent a certain pattern, do not generate new phrases. They are unique.*

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By phraseology we mean the branch of linguistics dealing with stable word-combinations characterized by certain transference of meaning. Despite differences of opinion, most authors agree upon some points concerning the distinctive features of phraseological units. Phraseology is the branch of lexicology specializing in word-groups which are characterized by stability of structure and transferred meaning. Phraseological units, or idioms, as they are called by most western scholars, represent what can probably be described as the most picturesque, colourful and expressive part of the language's vocabulary.

The basic units of analysis in phraseology are often referred to as phrasemes or phraseological units. Phraseological units are (according to Prof. Kunin A.V.) stable word-groups with partially or fully transferred meanings ("to kick the bucket", "Greek gift", "drink till all's blue", "drunk as a fiddler (drunk as a lord, as a boiled owl)", "as mad as a hatter (as a March hare)"). While according to Rosemarie Gläser, a phraseological unit is a lexicalized, reproducible billexemic or polylexemic words. We can find the meaning of a phraseological unit by one of its components (when it is motivated). In cognitive linguistics tradition, idioms are claimed to have conceptual motivation, on the other hand there are many phraseological units, the meaning of which cannot be found by knowing the meaning of one of its components (when it is not motivated). Its meaning should be traced by using the compositional analysis method. This method helps in need to discover the semantic meaning in the semantic field [2.143].

Integrity (or transference) of meaning means that none of the idiom components is separately associated with any referents of objective reality, and the meaning of the whole unit cannot be deduced from the meanings of its components;

Stability (lexical and grammatical) means that no lexical substitution is possible in an idiom in comparison with free or variable word-combinations (with an exception of some cases when such substitutions are made by the author intentionally). The experiments show that the meaning of an idiom is not exactly identical to its literal paraphrase given in the dictionary entry. That is why we may speak about lexical flexibility of many units if they are used in a creative

manner. Lexical stability is usually accompanied by grammatical stability which prohibits any grammatical changes;

Separability means that the structure of an idiom is not something indivisible, certain modifications are possible within certain boundaries. Here we meet with the so-called lexical and grammatical variants. To illustrate this point I may give some examples: "as hungry as a wolf (as a hunter)", "as safe as a house (houses)" in English.

On the whole phraseological units, even if they present a certain pattern, do not generate new phrases. They are unique. Interlanguage comparison, the aim of which is the exposure of phraseological conformities, forms the basis of a number of theoretical and applied trends of modern linguistic research, including the theory and practice of phraseography. But the question of determining the factors of interlanguage phraseological conformities as the main concept and the criterion of choosing phraseological equivalents and analogues as the aspect concepts is still at issue [5.267].

The analysis of special literature during the last decades shows that the majority of linguists consider the coincidence of semantic structure, grammatical (or syntactical) organization and componential (lexeme) structure the main criteria in defining the types of interlanguage phraseological conformities/disparities with the undoubted primacy of semantic structure.

Comparing the three approaches discussed above (semantic, functional, and contextual) we have ample ground to conclude that have very much in common as, the main criteria of phraseological units appear to be essentially the same, i.e. stability and idiomaticity or lack of motivation. It should be noted however that these criteria as elaborated in the three approaches are sufficient mainly to single out extreme cases: highly idiomatic non-variable and free word-groups.

According to the functional approach they are also regarded as phraseological units because of their grammatical (syntactic) inseparability and because they function, in speech as word-equivalents. According to the contextual

approach red tape, mare's nest, etc. make up a group of phraseological units referred to as idioms because of the impossibility of any change in the 'fixed context' and their semantic inseparability.

The status of the bulk of word-groups however cannot be decided with certainty with the help of these criteria because as a rule we have to deal not with complete idiomaticity and stability but with a certain degree of these distinguishing features of phraseological units. No objective criteria of the degree of idiomaticity and stability have as yet been suggested. Thus, e.g., to win a victory according to the semantic approach is a phraseological combination because it is almost completely motivated and allows of certain variability to win, to gain, a victory. According to the functional approach it is not a phraseological unit as the degree of semantic and grammatical inseparability is insufficient for the word-group to function as a word-equivalent. Small hours according to the contextual approach it is literal meaning. If however we classify it proceeding from the functional approach is a word-groups which are partially motivated is decided differently depending on which of the criteria of phraseological units is applied [3.134].

There is still another approach to the problem of phraseology in which an attempt is made to overcome the shortcoming of the phraseological theories discussed above. The main features of this new approach which is now more or less universally accepted by linguists are as follows:

- Phraseology is regarded as a self-contained branch of linguistics and, not as a part of lexicology.
- Phraseology deals with a phraseological subsystem of language and not with isolated phraseological units.
- Phraseology is concerned with all types of set expressions.
- Set expressions are divided into three classes: phraseological units (e.g. red tape, mare's nest, etc.), phraseomatic units (e.g. win a victory, launch a campaign, etc.) and borderline cases belonging to the mixed class. The main distinction between the first and the second classes is semantic: phraseological units have fully or partially transferred meanings while components of, phraseomatic units are used in their literal meanings.
- Phraseological and phraseomatic units are not regarded as word-equivalents but some of them are treated as word correlates.
- Phraseological and phraseomatic units are set expressions and their phraseological stability distinguishes them from free phrases and compound words.
- Phraseological and phraseomatic units are made up of words of different degree of wordness depending on the type of set expressions they are used in. (cf. e.g. small hours and red tape). Their structural separateness, an important factor of their stability, distinguishes them from compound words (cf. E.g. blackbird and black market).

Stability of use means that set expressions are reproduced ready-made and not created in speech. They are not elements of individual style of speech but language units.

Lexical stability means that the components of set expressions are either irreplaceable (e.g. red tape, mare's nest) or partly replaceable within the bounds of phraseological or phraseomatic variance: lexical (e.g. a skeleton in the cupboard – a skeleton in the closet), grammatical (e.g. to be in deep water – to be in deep waters), positional (e.g. head over ears – over head and ears), quantitative (e.g. to lead smb a dance- to lead smb a pretty dance), mixed variants (e.g. raise (stir up) a hornets' nest about one's ears- arouse (stir up) the nest of hornets).

Semantic stability is based on the lexical stability of set expressions. Even when occasional changes are introduced the meaning of set expression is preserved. It may only be specified, made more precise, weakened or strengthened. In other words in spite of all occasional phraseological and phraseomatic units, as distinguished from free phrases, remain semantically invariant or are destroyed. For example, the substitution of the verbal component in the free phrase to raise a question by the verb to settle (to settle a question) changes the meaning of the phrase, no such change occurs in to raise (stir up) a hornets' nest about one's ears [4.249].

The diachronic aspect of phraseology has scarcely been investigated. Just a few points of interest may be briefly reviewed in connection with the origin of phraseology has scarcely been investigated. Just a few points of interest may be briefly reviewed in connection with the origin of phraseological units and the ways they appear in language. It is assumed that almost all phrases can be traced back to free word-groups which in the course of the historical development of the English language have acquired semantic and grammatical process of grammaticalization or lexicalization.

The term lexicalization implies that the word-group under discussion develops into a word-equivalent, i.e. a phraseological unit or a compound word. These two parallel lines of lexicalization of free word-groups can be illustrated by the diachronic analysis.

There are some grounds to suppose that there exists a kind of interdependence between these two ways of lexicalization of free word-groups which makes them mutually exclusive. It is observed, for example, that compounds are more abundant in certain parts of speech, whereas phraseological units are numerically predominant in others. Thus, e.g., phraseological units are found in great numbers as verb-equivalents whereas compound verbs are comparatively few. This leads us to assume that lexicalization of free word-groups and their transformation into words or phraseological units is governed by the fewer phraseological units we are likely to encounter in this class of words.

Very little is known of the factors active in the process of lexicalization of free word-groups which results in the appearance of phraseological units. This problem may be viewed in terms of the degree of motivation. We may safely assume that a free word-group is transformed into a phraseological unit when it acquires semantic inseparability and becomes synchronically non-motivated.

The following may be perceived as the main causes accounting for the less of motivation of free word-groups:

When one of the components of a word-group becomes archaic or drops out of the language altogether the whole word-group may become completely or partially non-motivated. For example, lack of motivation in the word-group *kith and kin* may be accounted for by the fact that the member-word *kith* dropped out of the language altogether except as the component of the phraseological unit under discussion. This is also observed in the phraseological unit under discussion.

When as a result of a change in the semantic structure of a polysemantic word some of its meanings disappear and can be found only in certain collocations. The noun *mind*, e.g., once meant 'purpose' or 'intention' and this meaning survives in the phrases *to have a mind to do smth.*, *to change one's mind*, etc.

When a free word-group used in professional speech penetrates into general literary usage, it is often felt as non-motivated. To pull (the) strings (wires), e.g., was originally used as a free word-group in its direct meaning by professional actors in puppet shows. In Modern English, however, it has lost all connection with puppet-shows and therefore cannot also be observed in the phraseological unit *to stick to one's guns*, which can be traced back to military English, etc.

Sometimes extra-linguistic factors may account for the loss of motivation, to show the white feather - 'to act as a coward', e.g., can be traced back to the days when cock-fighting was popular. A white feather in a gamecock's plumage denoted bad breeding and was regarded as a sign of cowardice. Now that cock-fighting is no longer a popular sport, the phrase is felt as non-motivated [1.104].

When a word-group making up part of a proverb or saying begins to be used as a self-contained unit it may gradually become non-motivated if its connection with the corresponding proverb or saying is not clearly perceived. A new broom, e.g., originates as a component of the saying *new brooms sweep clean*. New broom as a phraseological unit may be viewed as non-motivated because the meaning of the whole is not deducible from the meaning of the components. Moreover, it seems grammatically and functionally self-contained and inseparable too. In the saying quoted above the noun *broom* is always used in the plural; as a member-word of the phraseological unit it is mostly used in the singular. The phraseological unit *a new broom* is characterized by functional inseparability. In the saying *new brooms sweep clean* the adjective *new* functions as an attribute to the noun *brooms*, in the phraseological unit *a new broom* (e.g. *Well he is a new broom!*) the whole word-group is functionally inseparable.

The final criterion in the semantic approach is idiomaticity whereas in the functional approach syntactic inseparability is viewed as the final test, and in the contextual approach it is stability of context combined with idiomaticity of word-groups. The concept of idiomaticity is not strictly defined. The judgement as to idiomaticity is passed sometimes within

the framework of the English language and sometimes from the outside - from the point of view of the mother tongue of the investigator. It is suggested here that the term idiomaticity should be interpreted as an intralingual notion and also that the degree of idiomaticity should be taken into consideration since between the extreme of complete motivation and lack of motivation there are numerous intermediate groups.

All the three approaches are sufficient to single out the extreme cases: highly idiomatic phraseological units and free word-groups. The status of the bulk of word-groups possessing different degrees of idiomaticity cannot be decided with certainty by applying the criteria available in linguistic science.

The distinguishing feature of the new approach is that phraseology is regarded as a self-contained branch of linguistics and not as a part of lexicology. According to this approach phraseology deals with all types of set expressions which are divided into three classes: phraseological units, phraseomatic units and border-line cases

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