



Modifications of Bookish Idioms: Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the analysis of idioms. The analysis without context considerably narrows the possibilities of the researcher. In speech and text idioms undergo through various modifications. In the terms of bookish idioms, we had concerns about their ability to be easily modified as most of them belong to outdated vocabulary or have obsolete word in their structure. The article presents the study of main research papers as well as the achievements made by internationally well-known scholars in the field of linguistics, also the study presents a short literature review on the problem of modifications of idioms. Secondly, there is an analysis of the experiment provided among students of Kazan Federal University Russian native speakers majoring at English. The experiment aimed at estimating capability of bookish idioms of English and Russian to undergo modifications. The materials of the study may be useful worldwide by educators and researchers involved in professional linguistic research and training.

Key words: idioms, cognitive structure of idioms, modifications of idioms, stylistic modifications, classification of idioms.



1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main reasons for modification of idioms is erasure of imagery and expressiveness of units. To increase expressive means of units people modify them grammatically and semantically. These processes are reflected both in speech and written texts. As a result, units acquire new meaning or stylistic colouring.

The significance of idioms in the language likewise their ubiquity in the vocabulary of our linguistic repertoire has been observed by many researchers. In recent years there has been considerable works concerning this question. Back in 1980-s A.V. Kunin took modifications of idioms into deep consideration. He named the use of modified idioms as “occasional use” and pointed out that “with the occasional use of the idiom, the effect provided is equal to the initial effect of its usual use” (Kunin,1996). Thus, he claims that modifications reflect the process of development of the language.

It should be mentioned that scholars still do not have a single terminological apparatus on modifications of idioms. The concept of the contextual transformation of the idioms is interpreted in different ways, for example, the occasional modification of idioms, the individual author's modification, the contextual modification of idiom. In foreign works, the following terms are encountered: “instantial stylistic use” and “nonce-variation” (Naciscione,2010).

Idioms are modified in the context it was A.V. Kunin who distinguished “phraseological actualizer” a word, a phrase, a sentence or a group of sentences that semantically relate to the idioms and act as a trigger for modification .

A great contribution to the study of the problems of the contextual use of idioms units was made by studies by E.F. Arsenteva and her disciples. The results of long term studies were published in numerous articles (Arsenteva et al, 2013; Arsenteva,2016;Arsenteva,2014). In her article, she focuses on phraseological creativity as the source of modification of idioms: “Phraseological creativity is the ability of macrometaphorical conceptual models, on the one hand, to systemically create phraseological images, on the other hand, to individually adapt any phraseological image to the communicative process” .

Anita Naciscione's research is devoted to the use of idioms in discourse. Under discourse analysis, the author understands a discipline whose purpose is to identify and describe linguistic regularities and irregularities in utterances that go beyond the sentence, and investigate the discourse-based behavior of phraseological units and the role of transformed units in creating textual meanings (Varlamova et al, 2016).



In general, occasional stylistic modifications are divided into three types: 1. Modifications that change the content side of the idioms, but do not violate their structure. 2. Modifications that change the structure of the idioms, changing the lexical component of units. 3. Complex modifications which are a combination of two or more types of occasional modifications (Guryanov, 2011).

2. METHODS

We based our studies on classification of idioms provided by E.F. Arsenteva who distinguished the following modifications. It should be noted that in Russian linguistic tradition the term phraseological unit (PU) is preferred to the term idiom:

1. Substitution or replacement of a PU Component (s); 2. Permutation; 3. Addition; 4. Insertion; 5. Cleft use, which is interrelated with insertion; 6. Deletion of a PU component (s) or ellipsis; 7. Phraseological allusion, which is closely connected with ellipsis; 8. Phraseological reiteration; 9. Phraseological pun; 10. Contamination of two PUs; 11. Extended phraseological metaphor; 12. Phraseological saturation of discourse.

3. RESULTS

In the article, we present the results of the experiments on three types of modifications: idiomatic pun, extended metaphor. The study was carried out among 40 Russian native speaking students of Kazan (Volga region) Federal University with their majors in English. Two groups of bookish idioms 10 units in each were selected. The idea was to compare the process of modifying idioms in L1 and L2. Due to our hypothesis, idiomatic modifications of L1 units should be more skillfully applied as the understanding of the image and metaphor that lies beneath the form of the unit is clearer for native speakers. Thus, students were asked to apply the following modifications idiomatic pun, extended metaphor and idiomatic repetition. The choice of these modifications caused by the fact that their application requires complete understanding of the image and metaphor of the idiom. The following idioms were chosen for the experiment (English): “bend the bow of Ulysses”, “caviare to the general”, “listen for the wings of Azrael”, “the silver cord is loosed”, “let loose the dogs of war”, “young barbarians” etc; (Russian): “заплечных дел мастер” (zapplechnyh del master) means “torturer”, “башня из слоновой кости” (bashnya iz slonovoj kosti) means “ivory tower”, “двуликий Янус” (dvulikiy YAnus) means “double-faced Janus”, “глас вопиющего в пустыне” (glas vopiyushchego v pustyne) – “voice crying in the desert”, “блудный сын” (bludnyj syn) – “prodigal son”, “соль земли” (sol' zemli) – “salt of the



earth”, “ящик Пандоры” (yashchik Pandory) – “Pandora’s box”, “синяя птица” (sinyaya ptica) – “blue bird” etc.

4. DISCUSSION

In this section, we show the most interesting examples taken from the experiment. The analysis of each example helps to trace the process of modification. We start with idiomatic pun. Idiomatic pun is the modification that applies both direct and figurative meaning of the idiom and produces humorous effect.

“*Young barbarians* coming to the lands of England gave birth to these **young barbarians** that disgraced the status of our university”.

This example is an allusion to the Anglo-Saxon invasion. It should be noted that the initial idiom “young barbarians” is also based on historical fact. Young barbarians were students of noble families who studied in best universities although did not study hard and their actions were far away from accepted behavior. This idiomatic pun is based on two historical facts that require knowledge of historical background of England. The next example looks artificial and lacks context but from formal characteristic it fulfills the requirements of the pun the use of the idiom or its components in direct and figurative meaning:

It was so hard to *bend* this steel. - Have you ever tried **to bend the bow of Ulysses?**

The next example is a classic example of double actualization of the meaning where the whole idiom is misunderstood and the component “bow” is deciphered in its direct meaning. The response to it finishes the structure of the pun:

- Alice got used to cope with hardships. But this matter was rather difficult. Eventually she **bent the bow of Ulysses.**

- Oh, she should *be a great archer!*

The same structure is observed in the next example:

- I wrote several novels earlier in my career that were very well received by academics, but they were **caviar to the general** and never achieved popularity.

- But usually *caviar is never for general*, have you seen the *price* of it?!

We observed several examples of combination of modifications. Here we observe cleft use of the component “unexpectedly” and idiomatic pun. That shows us that processes of modification combine each other to extend and enrich the meaning of the idiom:

- It was an ordeal. Almost I coped with it when **the silver cord is unexpectedly loosed.**

- I wonder how you *tied* it!



Native speakers of Russian showed relatively the same capability of modification of idioms:

- Его подарки, словно **ящик Пандоры!** Никогда не знаешь, чего от них ожидать.
- “Lit. His gifts are like **Pandora’s box!** You never know what to expect from them”.
- Да уж, по твоим браслетам из «*Пандоры*» видно, что ты открываешь эти *ящички*.
- “Lit. Yeah, your ‘*Pandora’s*’ bracelets prove that you open these boxes”.

In this example, we see how informant modifies idiomatic expression “Pandora’s box” by inserting association with brand “Pandora” that specializes on selling bracelets. Pun receives ironic meaning.

The next type of modification that we observed during the experiment is extended metaphor. This type of modification extends the meaning of the initial idiom by adding sub-images aimed at the idiom. We may observe this modification in the following examples:

“Alice got used to cope with hardships. But this matter was rather difficult. Eventually she **bent the bow of Ulysses**. Indeed, it was *hard bow, harder than other ones*”.

In this example, the image of Ulysses’s bow is enlarged by the construction “hard bow, harder than other ones”, which is introduced to intensify the original meaning of the idiom – “to accomplish something very difficult”.

“I wrote several novels earlier in my career that were very well received by academics, but they **were caviar to the general** and never achieved popular success. *This caviar was so salted* that I promised never to write this way”.

Based on the nuclear image of “caviar”, a word combination “salted caviar” was created to intensify the initial meaning of the idiom “too complex work for understanding”.

“Отношения с этим человеком были отвратительные. Я открывал подарок от него в свой день рождения, точно **ящик пандоры**, *полный подвоха и всякой пакости* (*Otnosheniya s ehtim chelovekom byli otvratitel'nye. YA otkryval podarok ot nego v svoj den' rozhdeniya, tochno yashchik pandory, polnyj podvoha i vsyakoj pakosti*)”.

(“Relations with this man were awful. Every time I opened his gift on my birthday, it was like pandora’s box, full of tricks and filth”).

This image of the idiom is expanded due to the introduction of additional components “trick” and “filth”, that define negative connotation of this idioms in the context.

The last modification under study is idiomatic repetition that mostly used to intensify the meaning of idiom in the context. Two variants of modification are applicable



complete repetition and repetition of nuclear components. Both variants are presented in the following examples:

You should do your best to **bend the bow of Ulysses**.

- *Bend the bow of Ulysess? You think?*

Alice got used to cope with hardships. But this matter was rather difficult. Eventually she **bent the bow of Ulysses**. Her colleagues didn't believe in her success, but she proved it *by bending the bow*.

In this example, we observe the repetition of only a part of the nuclear components "bending" and "bow", in this case, idiomatic repetition is justified, since it points to additional information that Alice's difficult task was performed despite expectations of colleagues.

The same type of repetition we may observe in the next example:

I wrote several novels earlier in my career that were very well received by academics, but they were **caviar to the general** and never achieved popularity. I tried never to mention about that *caviar* in my interviews.

In this example, only one component "box" is repeated, this is the case of economy of speech resources. Also, here we see the addition of component "domestic problems" this transformation clarifies the meaning of the idioms.

Richard began to re-build his house. Unfortunately, his reforms opened **Pandora's box of domestic problems**. His wife was against most of his ideas. Soon, this *box* was closed by compromise.

In Russian examples we also observed partial repetition:

- Это же твоя мечта, ты шел к ней всю жизнь. Это же твоя *синяя*, как же это?

(Еhto zhe tvoya mechta, ty shel k nej vsyu zhizn'. Еhto zhe tvoya sinyaya, kak zhe ehto?) (It's your dream, you've been going to it all your life. This is your blue, how is it?)

- Моя **Синяя птица**? (Моя Sinyaya ptica?) (My blue bird?)

-Точно! (Tochno!) (Right!)

Idiomatic repetition in this example is based on mentioning only the component "blue", which reveals to the interlocutor the full image of idiom (Spears,2005).

All the above examples of phraseological repetition are characterized by reasonable use, the main purpose of which is to enhance the stylistic effect of phraseology and the



transfer of the connotative aspect of phraseology. “Cultural literacy allows independent use of communication tools and knowledge” (Gafiyatova et al, 2016).

5. CONCLUSION

Experimental studies have made it possible to reveal the dependence of modifying possibilities of idioms on the number of its components and transparency of the internal form. Also during experimental study, it was revealed that a high level of knowledge of L2 and understanding modifying mechanisms of idiom allows non-native speakers easily modify idioms. We did not find any reasonable difference between modifications in L1 and L2.

Understanding the basic metaphorical image of idiom and creating on its basis a selection / sub-image, combined into one metaphorical chain, is necessary for the correct use of the extended metaphor. The use of extended metaphors by informants confirmed the fact that application of this modification requires the ability of figurative and associative thinking, alongside with the ability to understand and use both the direct and figurative meaning of a unit.

An idiomatic pun that requires knowledge of both direct and figurative meaning of idiom. It is noteworthy that a significant proportion of examples of this type of occasional use of idioms fell on the dialogical speech. The mechanism of creation puns was based on ignorance of the figurative meaning of idiom by one of the interlocutors. A significant number of examples of phraseological repetition was the repetition of all phraseology in English and Russian. The purpose of idiomatic repetition, from the point of view of the participants of the experiment, is to add emotiveness of stylistic colouring to the idiom. The results of the experiment clearly demonstrated that a good knowledge of the language and mastery of mechanism of idiomatic modifications are the main requirements for creative use of idiomatic composition of the language both by native and non-native speakers.

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