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Phrasemes: Reasons for Reproducibility and Specificity of Sign Functions

Abstract. The paper examines mechanisms of phraseologization and reasons for reproducibility of nominative phrasemes on the material of the English and Russian metalanguage (denoting language and speech phenomena) phraseological units collected from dictionaries. It views two classes of reproducible nominative units: 1) idiomatic phrasemes – they arise as a result of phraseologization of free word combinations through developing figurative meanings and become reproducible due to the demand for expressive names conveying emotive, attitudinal meanings; 2) non-idiomatic phrasemes – in this case phraseologization of free word combinations is ensured by nominative accuracy and boils down to reducing variants of possible linguistic expression of a concept to one nominative unit, reproducibility is explained by the need for neutral names expressing factual meanings. The paper determines the proportions of the two classes of phrasemes in the research material and on the bases of the data obtained ranks the functions of phrasemes.

Key words: *phraseme, phraseologization, reproducibility, expressive function, nominative function*

Most of the phrasemes originate from free multilexemic expressions. The process of phraseologization of a multilexemic expression consists in acquiring the quality of reproducibility and can be caused by different reasons – the multilexemic expression may take on a figurative meaning or it may turn out to be an only or most accurate name of a concept. The paper on the material of the English and Russian nominative metalanguage (connected with language and speech) phraseology views the classes of phrasemes in accordance with the mechanisms of their formation and their functions: 1) idiomatic phrasemes the reproducibility of which is insured by the need for bright, vivid names of concepts (they are often secondary names functioning as expressive replacements of existing neutral monolexemic namings) – *a peg to hang something on* 'a topic for discussion' (БАРС II: 385), *звонить во все колокола* (lit. to toll all the church bells) 'to talk about sth everywhere'

(ФСРЯ: 90): 2) non-idiomatic phrasemes which are reproduced because they function as one and only or most accurate neutral names of concepts often not having any monolexemic match – *to have (a) bad press* 'to be criticized a lot by newspapers' (LID: 272), *свобода слова* 'the right to express one's views' (OnlineБТС). The paper determines the proportions of the two classes of phrasemes and on the basis of the data ranks the sign functions of phrasemes.

The research material has been taken from modern dictionaries which contain the reproducible nominative units of the mentioned types: «Longman Idioms Dictionary» (LID), «Фразеологический словарь русского языка» (ФСРЯ) and other paper and electronic phraseological and lexico-phraseological dictionaries of the English and Russian languages. The total corpus size is 1879 phrasemes, including 850 English phrasemes, 1029 Russian ones.

1. Phrasemes that arise as a result of constant use of multilexemic expressions in figurative meanings

The multilexemic expressions *breathe fire* 'to talk in a way that shows you are very angry and determined to get what you want' (LID: 121), *напустить туману* (lit. to blow the fog) 'to make the story unclear, confusing' (ФСРЯ: 296) became phraseologized because they acquired an integral figurative meaning. According to Ch. Bally, semantically integral phrasemes are termed phraseological unities (Bally 1936: 66–87). Phraseological unities are idiomatic – they contain lexemes (one or more) in non-usual (not registered in dictionaries) meanings. In the idiomatic phraseme *call off the dogs* 'to tell sb to stop criticizing someone else' (LID: 90) all the constituents actualize non-usual meanings. In the phraseme *крылатые выражения* (lit. winged expressions) 'expressions that have become reproducible, popular' (ФСРЯ: 126) the constituent *выражения* 'expressions' actualizes its usual meaning, but the constituent *крылатые* (lit. winged) has a special meaning 'that have become reproducible, popular' which is not given in any dictionary, and this makes the phraseme idiomatic in the constituent *крылатые*.

Among the semantically integral idiomatic phrasemes two groups of units are distinguished: transparent and non-transparent phrasemes.

The transparent idiomatic phraseme is characterized by bi-plane semantics – coexistence of actual figurative and etymological literal meanings. Components of such a phraseme agree semantically, and this ensures the possibil-

ity of understanding the literal meaning of the phrase forming the phraseme and of a subsequent transition to the figurative meaning. Literal semantization of the combination of words making the phraseme *тяжелая артиллерия* (lit. heavy artillery) draws the image of powerful firearms. The actual meaning of the phraseme 'the most authoritative and indisputable arguments you resort to when your own proofs are exhausted in a dispute' (ФСРЯ: 12) fixes the connection between the two notions – of large-caliber guns used in a combat when light guns are deemed unsuitable to achieve the desired result, and of authoritative arguments involved in a dispute when the evidence provided turns out to be not convincing enough – on the bases of the semantic feature 'efficiency, effectiveness'. Literal reading of the phrase *tie sb's tongue* 'to force sb to keep silence' (АРФС, 1099) creates an image of a situation in which a person ties the tongue of another person. The association of depriving tongue of the ability to move freely with coercion to silence is based on the metonymic convergence of the tongue and human speech ability.

The non-transparent idiomatic phraseme has lost its etymological meaning, its actual meaning is unmotivated. According to V. V. Vinogradov, the unmotivated semantically integral idiomatic phraseme is termed a phraseological fusion (Виноградов 1977: 121). The components of the phraseological fusion do not agree semantically – synchronically it is impossible to understand the literal meaning of the combination of words forming the phraseme and to recognize the ideas that brought the phraseme to life: *curry favour (with sb)* 'to try to make sb like you by saying nice things about them or doing sth for them' (LID: 115), *благим матом кричать* 'to cry in a very loud voice' (ФСРЯ: 143). Non-transparency (lack of motivation of the actual meaning) of such a phraseme may be due to various reasons of extra- and intralinguistic nature: the circumstances in which the phraseme arose may be forgotten, a constituent lexeme or some meaning of a constituent lexeme may go out of use, some grammatical form of a constituent lexeme may become obsolete etc. In the phraseme *curry favour* the components semantically disagree – the literal semantization does not make sense, the motive of nomination is obscure. Non-transparency of the phraseme is caused by the change of its original form and the loss of the associations that generated it: the phraseme is an early 16th-century alteration of the Middle English *curry favel*, Favel being the name of a chestnut horse in an early 14th-century French romance who epitomized cunning and duplicity (OnlineFD). The phraseme *благим матом кричать* contains the obsolete noun *мат* with the meaning 'voice', the adjective *благой* realizes its obsolete meaning 'strong' (РФИЭС: 419).

The majority of synchronically unmotivated idiomatic phrasemes – phraseological fusions – consist of lexemes which are widely used and well-known (although they realize in the phrasemes the meanings different from those given in dictionaries): *cock and bull story* 'a story, excuse etc. that you think is very hard to believe' (LID: 65), *перемывать косточки* (lit. wash bones) 'gossip about someone' (ФСРЯ: 119). A few of them contain unique phraseologically bound lexemes which exist in the language only as components of one phraseme (or a few phrasemes) and are not very clear in meaning: *Thursday morning <u>tippy</u> <u>tappys</u>* 'a person who criticizes or passes judgement with benefit of hindsight' (OnlineFD), *прописать <u>ижицу</u>* (*ижица* is the name of the last letter (*v*) of the Church Slavonic and Old Russian alphabet) 'to reprimand someone severely' (ФСРЯ: 96).

2. Phrasemes which come into common use as one and only or most accurate names of their concepts

The phrases *refuse to take no for an answer* 'not to accept a refusal, to be persistent in demanding sth' (OnlineFD), *слоговое письмо* 'a writing system in which each symbol represents a spoken syllable instead of an individual sound' (ФСРЯ: 264) have acquired the quality of reproducibility because these accurate wordings have been repeatedly used to refer to the actual concepts. The reproducible nominative units of this type are non-idiomatic – their semantics is constructed out of the usual (registered in dictionaries) meanings of their components. According to N. M. Shansky, they are termed phraseological expressions (Шанский 1996: 69).

Complete non-idiomaticity is rare for phraseology. The semantics of many phraseological expressions includes the semantic features of their components and some further features – semes which differ from those making the semantics of the constituent lexemes – and this creates some idiomaticity. The meaning of the phraseme *name names* 'to mention the names of people involved when reporting bad behavior or making an accusation' (LID: 241; OnlineFD) includes the meanings of the components *to name* 'to mention' (OnlineFD) and *a name* 'a word by which a person is commonly and distinctively known' (OnlineFD) and a further semantic feature 'when reporting bad behavior or making an accusation'. The presence of further semes in the semantics of this and similar phrasemes indicates that they are idiomatic, although to a minimal degree (Mel'čuk 1995, p. 183).

Among the non-idiomatic phrasemes, a small group of units with unique phraseologically bound lexemes are distinguished: *subjunctive mood*

'a mood of a verb used to describe hypothetical or non-real actions' (OnlineFD), *верительные грамоты* (lit. letters credential) 'documents certifying the appointment of a certain person as a diplomatic representative in some state' (ФСРЯ: 26). The bound lexemes have a very narrow co-occurance range – they occur together with one or a few lexemes. Most of them are obsolete words (historicisms, archaisms: *обиняком говорить* (lit. to speak with hints; *обиняк* is an archaic name of a hint) 'to speak with hints' (ФСРЯ: 175)) or poorly adapted borrowings (Latinisms and Church-Slavonicisms which appeared as inexact calques in translations from Greek: *genitive case* 'the grammatical case expressing possession, measurement, or source' (OnlineFD) is from Latin *casus genitives*; the word *genitivus* 'of or belonging to birth' was misused by Latin grammarians to render Greek *genikē ptōsis* 'the general or generic case', *genikē* expressing 'race or kind', *genikos* also meaning 'belonging to the family' (OnlineED)). The non-idiomatic reproducible units which combine in their structure free and unique phraseologically bound lexemes are known as phraseological combination (Шанский 1996: 68).

The bound lexemes can hardly be viewed as autonomous units of a language – each of them exists in a language and occurs in speech only as a component of a particular phraseme (one or a few), its meaning realizes only within a phraseme. Phraseologically bound status of such words is signaled in a special way in Russian lexicographic works. They are registered in dictionaries as parts of phrasemes and are not provided with definitions of their own – phrasemes that include them are defined instead: *взгадать* ◇ *ни вздумать, ни взгадать, ни пером описать* 'about someone, something so beautiful that it is hard to convey' (MAC I: 165). Phrasemes that include unique components with extremely narrow syntagmatics have a rather unclear semantics, and therefore they are on the periphery of usage. Phraseological combinations that contain poorly adapted borrowings are used mainly in professional spheres or in literature to create a specific effect. Phraseological combinations with obsolete lexemes are gradually fading from language.

Syntagmatic "bindingness" is a gradual property inherent (in varying degree) in phrasemes, collocations and free word combinations. "All combinations of words," writes Yu. D. Apresyan, "are more or less unfree and, therefore, all lexical meanings are more or less bound, that is, dependent on semantic, lexical, syntactic or other context" (Апресян 1989: 111). It seems, however, that the three types of syntagmatic bindingness – bindingness of free word combinations, collocations and phraseological combinations – can be differentiated.

Bindingness of free combinations of lexemes is determined by the semantic relations of lexemes – the lexemes that have common semes (semantical and grammatical clamps, or ties) can be united (*crisp toast*, *in order to travel*), those that do not are never put together (phrases like **crisp jam*, **in order travels* are impossible in speech).

In collocations one of the components is selected contingent on another one. The choice of intensifiers in the collocations *perfectly healthy*, *seriously wealthy*, *highly respected*, *deeply moving*, *painfully sensitive* is determined by the adjectives as keywords. The meaning 'beginning' in the collocations *завязать дружбу* (lit. to tie friendship) 'to make friends', *развязать войну* (lit. to untie war) 'to start a war', *подняться на борьбу* (lit. to rise to fight) 'to begin fight', *прийти в восторг* (lit. to come to delight) 'to become delighted', *впасть в панику* (lit. to fall into panic) 'to become panic-stricken' is expressed by verbs contingent on the noun keywords.

Bindingness of phraseological combinations is imposed by the norm of usage established in the literary language in defiance of the general selection and combination rules of the language. The adjective *курсорный* 'cursory' has a very narrow syntagmatics – it occurs in one and only phraseological combination *курсорное чтение* (lit. cursory reading) 'rapid reading, without detailed analysis' which is used in teaching foreign languages (МАС II: 154). According to the general rules of the Russian language the adjective *курсорный* with the meaning 'performed rapidly and without attention to detail' could be used to describe a variety of continued intellectual actions (in word combinations like **курсорное ознакомление* (lit. *cursory examination*), **курсорная проверка* (lit. *cursory inspection*)), but the norm secures it to one action – reading.

3. Main search results

Quantitative analysis of the metalanguage corpus collected from modern dictionaries has shown that the percentage of idiomatic phrasemes – phraseological unities and phraseological fusions – in the Russian (62%) and English (75%) material is one and a half – three times as high as the percentage of non-idiomatic phrasemes – phraseological expressions and phraseological combinations.

The data obtained suggest that the expressive function prevails over the purely nominative function in phraseology. Idiomatic phrasemes serve in language as the main means of conveying emotive, attitudinal content. The expressive function is realized by both phraseological and lexical units;

however, idiomatic phrasemes considerably exceed idiomatic (in figurative meanings) lexemes by number. The earlier study of the English and Russian metalanguage nominative units – lexemes and phrasemes – has shown that among the expressive idiomatic units the percentage of phrasemes is two and a half times higher than the percentage of lexemes (Гутовская 2018: 63–64). Idiomatic phrasemes also exceed lexemes by the degree of expressiveness. According to Teliya, a more powerful expressive effect of phrasemes is due to the fact that they "reflect a whole image-situation and act as a microtext in a text" (Телия 1996: 83): cf. *звонить* (lit. to toll) 'to talk about sth everywhere' (OnlineБТС) and *звонить во все колокола* (lit. to toll all the church bells) 'to talk about sth to everyone, everywhere' (ФСРЯ: 90).

Non-idiomatic phrasemes form quite a large class of phraseology. They nominate factual content together with non-idiomatic lexemes. The functions of lexemes and phrasemes in conveying factual content are delineated: lexemes specialize in expressing general factual meanings, phrasemes convey more specific factual meanings, nominate a variety of nuances that cannot be named by lexemes: cf. *word* and *household word*, *four-letter word*, *function word*. The study of the English and Russian metalanguage nominative units has shown that among the nominative units with general factual meanings the percentage of lexemes is five times as high as the percentage of phrasemes, among the units with more specific factual meanings the percentage of phrasemes is one and a half times as high as the percentage of lexemes (Гутовская 2018: 63). The majority of phraseological expressions and phraseological combinations are one and only names of their denotata and do not have any monolexemic match, which indicates the high status of non-idiomatic phrasemes in the system of nominative means of language.

The results obtained allow us to conclude that according to lexicographic sources the most active feeder of phraseological stock are idiomatic phrasemes which arise as a result of a constant use of multilexemic expressions in figurative meanings and fulfill an expressive function. The second active feeder are non-idiomatic phrasemes which come into common use due to their ability to name details of their denotata and perform a pure nominative function.

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Phraseme: Gründe für die Reproduzierbarkeit und Specifität der nominativen Funktion

Zusammenfassung

Im vorliegenden Artikel werden Mechanismen der Phraseologisierung und Gründe für Reproduzierbarkeit nominativer Phraseologismen am Material von den Wörterbüchern entnommenen phraseologischen Einheiten der Metasprache (Bezeichnungen für Sprach- und Redephänomene) im Englischen und Russischen untersucht.

Betrachtet werden zwei Klassen reproduzierbarer nominativer Einheiten: 1) idiomatische Phraseologismen, die als Ergebnis der Phraseologisierung freier Wortverbindungen durch die Entwicklung übertragener Bedeutungen entstehen und reproduzierbar werden, um als expressive Namen emotive, evaluative Bedeutungen zu vermitteln; 2) bei nicht idiomatischen Phraseologismen wird die Phraseologisierung freier Wortverbindungen durch nominative Genauigkeit gewährleistet, sie reduziert Varianten des möglichen sprachlichen Ausdrucks für einen Begriff auf eine nominative Einheit, die Reproduzierbarkeit lässt sich dadurch erklären, dass neutrale Namen faktische Bedeutungen zum Ausdruck bringen sollen. Im Artikel wird das Verhältnis dieser zwei Klassen der Phraseologismen im Forschungsmaterial festgestellt: die idiomatischen Phraseologismen bilden 75 Prozent der englischsprachigen und 62 Prozent der russischsprachigen metasprachlichen Phraseologismen, während die nicht idiomatischen Phraseologismen 25 Prozent bzw. 38 Prozent ausmachen. Aufgrund der erhobenen Daten wird im Artikel der Schluss gezogen, dass expressive Funktion in der Phraseologie wichtiger ist als reine nominative Funktion; im Artikel werden besondere detaillierende spezifizierende Besonderheiten reiner nominativer Phraseologismen betont.