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Phraseological Errors in a Foreigner's Talk Discourse and Their Reasons

Abstract. The aim of the paper is to reveal the types of errors in using Russian idioms that were made by a native English speaker with an advanced level of proficiency in Russian, as well as to find out the reasons for these errors. The author states that the speaker under study, a journalist, has good knowledge of the Russian phraseological stock and great skill in using it in his talk discourse. The author argues, however, that the revealed in the course of study subtle flaws and inadequacies in the use of some Russian phraseological units by the native English speaker in his almost perfect Russian discourse are the results of the native language interference and insufficient semantization of the Russian phraseological units, which is partly related to the incomplete lexicographic data about their semantics, pragmatics, and usage.

Key words: *phraseological units, Russian idioms, English native speaker, phraseological errors, frequency of idioms usage data*

1. Introduction: Phraseological units and their major characteristics

The results of corpus investigations (Sinclair 1991) proved that our speech, no matter how creative it may be, is full of restrictions, prefabricated and memorized formulas and patterns, i.e., it is full of phraseological units. “**Phraseological units**” (PhUs) are multiword language chunks, possessing features of a word and a phrase and naming a complex conceptual structure like *a scenario* (*A person is known by the company he keeps; a bull in a china shop; Hobson's choice*) or *a frame* (*red tape; small talk*).

In contrast to free phrases they are ready-made and believed to be *syntactically unproductive*, or *frozen*, and lexically *fixed*, or *set*. No alterations are possible there, even the process of passivization as in *to kick the bucket* ‘to die’ → **the bucket is kicked* ‘the water container is struck out with the foot’. Some phraseological units, however, admit certain variations. For example, to de-

note the idea of unfitness of a person for a position, activity or relationship with someone we may use in English the phraseological unit *a square peg in a round hole* or *a round peg in a square hole* (the first variant of the idiom is, however, more frequently used). Or another example, to speak about similarities in manners, behavior, interests, ideals, etc. between parents and their children we may say *Like father, like son* or *Like mother, like daughter* or *Like father, like child* or *Like parents, like children* or *Like parent, like child* and all the variants of the idiom are accepted in the language. Moreover, recent corpus-based research (Geeraert et al. 2017: 80) has illustrated that idioms are not as fixed or rigid in form as previously assumed).

Besides being complex language signs containing features of both lexical and syntactic language units, PhUs are also **cultural signs**. They contain a lot of history and culture of the language community they are used in, and studying PhUs we learn a lot about the country and its people. Thus, and the English saying *to carry coals to Newcastle* means 'to do something that is obviously superfluous'. This meaning has arisen from the fact that *Newcastle* is a city in northeast England where coal is mined, so naturally, there is no need to carry coals there.

Phraseological units are exclusively various in etymology, meaning, structure, and function, and accordingly there are various definitions and classifications of them.

Semantically phraseological units demonstrate different degree of transparency, i.e., motivation, or ability to be comprehended by mere combining the meanings of their components. Accordingly, V. V. Vinogradov (1947) and later N. M. Shanskiy (1969) distinguished between:

- completely demotivated **phraseological fusions** (or **idioms**): *a mare's nest* 'an illusory discovery; a complex and difficult situation, a muddle',
- partially demotivated **phraseological unities**: *to show one's teeth* 'to be unfriendly',
- slightly demotivated and quite transparent **phraseological collocations**: *to meet the requirements* 'to satisfy the conditions/requirements', and
- transparent habitual phrases, or **set-expressions**: *in time* 'before the latest possible time'.

Structurally phraseological units are also different: they may correlate to different types of **word collocations** (both **grammatical**: *red tape*; *to have a nose*; *to have sticky fingers*; *Sleep tight!* and **ungrammatical**: *by and by*; *so far so good*) or to fully fledged **sentences** (as *Life is not a bed of roses.*).

Functionally phraseological units are also very diverse. As reproducible ready-made language unities, PhUs perform a number of different functions, among them are:

- **cognitive:**
 1. accumulative: they gather historical and cultural data about the speech community (*mad as a hatter* 'The expression has its origins in the effects of the chronic mercury poisoning that hat manufacturers commonly experienced by 18th and 19th century because of the use of mercurous nitrate in felt hats'),
 2. thought and emotion provoking: to activate other more prototypical concepts in the hearer's mind to make the object of communication more clear: *Jim flirts with his sister-in-law only because she's forbidden fruit*,
- **referential:**

to refer to a concept of an action, state, thing, quality, quantity or event: *pull an invisible string; to be under the thumb of smb; a bag of bones; a baker's dozen*,
- **communicative:**
 1. stating the affairs and conveying information as in: *A house is not a home. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing*,
 3. structuring a discourse and keeping it going: to begin, end a discourse or act as a filler in it: *What shall we speak about? You are kidding! That's it! ... you know, What's the world coming to?*, etc. "Idioms are like lubricants that make language run and flow smoothly" (Jabboori, Jazza 2013: 9),
- **pragmatic:**
 1. illocutionary: to deliver the speaker's intention, like giving an opinion, advice, command, etc., in a more polite and indirect way: *First catch your hare then cook him. Don't count your chickens before they are hatched*,
 2. regulatory: to regulate the degree of social proximity between the communicators: (Informal) *Stay/keep in touch!* – suggests an easy, relaxed attitude, tone; (Formal) *Look forward to hear from you*,
- **stylistic:**
 1. expressive (to express emotions that add "colour" to everyday discourse and make it less boring): *Once in a blue moon I spend time with my parents. Damn it!* or to express emotions and attitude towards the object of conversation: *banana republic; flea pit*,
 2. compressive (to make speech laconic): *Say when* 'say when I am to stop pouring in your glass'; *Life is not a bed of roses* 'a situation, activity or life is not always comfortable and easy',
 3. allegorical (to speak indirectly through symbolic figures about actual situation): *Birds of a feather flock together* 'people of the same sort or with the same tastes and interests will be found together', etc.

Phraseological units are usually **based on some key (pivotal) words** but as language units PhUs do not belong to the basic vocabulary of a language.

PhUs are **characteristic of an adult speech** and are acquired quite late, usually after 6 years old. Sporadically they may appear in their speech much earlier though they may not be comprehended fully (Питеркина 2009).

Focusing attention on the role of phraseological units in a language system, many scholars also point out that:

- phraseology is not just periphery and but the heart of the language (Ellis 2009, 1–14),
- phraseological units make up a significant part in vocabulary of any language. It is estimated that the number of only idiomatic expressions in English is at least 25,000 (Jackendoff 1997),
- PhUs are used in various spheres and styles of discourse,
- they are a valuable source of knowledge about culture and history.

2. Phraseological units in foreign language didactics

Foreign language teachers agree that idioms play an important role in teaching a foreign language because they lead to a better proficiency and a higher fluency in a foreign language. “Being familiar with a wide range of idioms and able to use them accurately and appropriately are among the distinguishing marks of a native command of the language and trustworthy indicators of the proficiency of foreign learners” (Cowie et al. 1993: xi).

Yet, there are some **stumbling blocks** that prevent PhUs from being in the focus of foreign language didactics due to a number of factors. Phraseological units:

- are not easily semantically decomposable and comprehensible, and for this reason they need special attention. Thus, the PhU *It's a piece of cake* ‘something that is simple to accomplish’ or *to chew the fat* ‘to talk without a purpose’ can hardly be understood from the text, they should be explained first and then learned,
- are not the only possible naming units of the concepts; to express a certain concept other ways may be learned by a foreigner and he or she may not need the PhU for a long time: *by and by* = ‘eventually’, ‘ultimately’, ‘finally’, ‘one day’,
- are not straightforwardly recognizable and extractable from the text. For example, a non-native English speaker can hardly say that the advertising headline *Introducing a luxury car that will not take you for a ride* (The New Yorker, Oct. 7, 1985) includes the phraseological unit *take smb*

for a ride the two meanings of which 1. 'to kill, finish off smb'; 2. 'to inflate, deceive smb' are played up here,

- their limits of variations and restrictions are not lexicographically recorded, that is why it is not easy for a foreign language learner to be creative with PhUs.

3. Typology of phraseological errors made by foreign learners of Russian

The factors mentioned above keep PhUs at the periphery in didactics, especially in teaching and learning a foreign or second language. As a result foreign language learners either avoid phraseological units in their speech or make too many errors (Alkarazoun 2015).

The papers dedicated to analysis of errors made by foreign language learners of Russian phraseological units (Садыгова 2016 et al.) point to the following problematic issues in acquisition Russian:

- **in comprehension:**

In addition to difficulties in identification, PhUs may cause wrong inference of their meaning out of the context. Thus, the Russian PhU *яблоку негде упасть* which literally means 'apple has nowhere to fall' may be understood by a foreign learner as the characteristic feature of an apple-tree which is generously fruitful-bearing and there is no place for a more apple on the ground under it, instead of the correct figurative meaning of the PhU 'the place is overcrowded, there's not an inch of room, there's no room to move'. One should use at least a phraseological dictionary to acquire its meaning, etymology and use.

- **in production:**

1. Being driven by innate language creativity and not being aware of phraseological restrictions, foreign students learning Russian often violate lexical and grammatical stability of a PhU by:

- replacing a word in a PhU by a synonymic or a more general one: thus, instead of *львиная доля* ('lion's share') they may say *львиная часть* ('lion's part');
- shortening or extending a PhU because of the native language interference (or no obvious reason): for example, instead of *оставлять желать лучшего* (lit.: 'to leave to wish better') they may mistakenly say *оставлять желать много лучшего* (lit. to leave to wish *much* better) – this intensifier in the PhU is possible in English (cf. Eng.: *leave much to be desired*) but not in Russian;

- blending, or contaminating, i.e., mistakenly associating and interacting two PhUs and thus making a third PhU not existing in the language: for example, instead of *играть роль* ('to play a role') и *иметь значение* ('to have meaning') they may say *играть значение* ('to play meaning');
- using wrong grammatical forms: thus, instead of *бабушка надвое сказала* 'the grandmother said with a double meaning, ambiguously, with the implication that the event on question will not happen' (the adverb *надвое* 'ambiguously, with a double meaning') they may say *бабушка на двоих сказала* 'the grandmother said in two' where *на двоих* is a numeral with a preposition.

2. Russian foreign language learners quite often do not take into account the stylistic register of a PhU; for example, they may inappropriately use a stylistically marked PhU in a neutral general discourse: instead of *Командир приказал уходить* 'The commander offered to leave' they may say *Командир приказал сматывать удочки* 'The commander offered to up sticks'. Another example: instead of *Среди слушателей были студенты, которые плохо говорили по-русски* 'Among the audience there were students who spoke Russian poorly' foreign students learning Russian may inappropriately use for the concept 'to speak poorly' a Russian colloquial phraseological unit *не вязать лыка* (lit. not to knit bast) which means that a person is so drunk that he cannot even talk or do the simplest things.

These common errors in the use of phraseological units revealed in the speech of foreign students learning Russian are characteristic of the students with the level of **proficiency not higher than intermediate** when they have already acquired much information about the language structure and system but may not be proficient enough in appropriate use of phraseological units. But the use of phraseological units by those who are at **the advanced level** of foreign language learning reaching native-like fluency is currently not studied sufficiently enough.

4. Deviations in use of phraseological units by an English native speaker fluent in Russian

At the advanced level of language proficiency the use of phraseological units in the talk discourse may cause less obvious yet serious problems for foreigners.

Let us have a look at the kinds of errors that a very proficient Russian language learner (an English, or rather American, native speaker) makes while using Russian phraseological units in his talk discourse.

The research is carried out on the material of samples of talk discourse by Michael Bohm, the American journalist and political analyst who has lived in Russia for almost 20 years, was married a Russian woman and has a daughter. He speaks fluent Russian though with a slight accent. In one of his interviews, he stated that he even began to think exclusively in Russian (American journalist Michael Bohm: 2018). Michael Bohm is a regular guest on Russian TV political talk shows where he makes wide use of Russian phraseological units. Listening to Michael Bohm's political talk discourse and reading interviews with him, a native speaker, however, cannot get rid of a feeling that something is wrong with his Russian, but one can hardly say what is wrong there.

In order to clear out this issue, we examined the interview with Michael Bohm taken by Alexander Mel'man and published 20.11.2015 in *Moskovskij komsomolets* titled *Мальчик для битья (Whipping boy)* (Мельман 2015).

The results of the carried research show that apart from a slight accent, Michael Bohm practically does not seem to make gross grammatical or lexical errors in his discourse.

We have discovered, however, two major deviations in Michael Bohm's speech concerning phraseological units:

1. their excessive use in his talk discourse, and,
2. their slightly inadequate use.

Let us consider them in more detail.

1) The excessive use of PhUs in talk discourse

This interview is of 2302 words where almost half of them, 1043 words, were used by Michael Bohm in his 63 answers to questions. Thus, an average answering utterance according to the word counter is approximately 16 words.

The results also confirm that unlike many other foreigners speaking Russian, Michael Bohm's talk discourse is highly idiomatic and, moreover, he skillfully deviates the learned forms of PhUs and adapts them to the communicative situation, which demonstrates his native-like phraseological competence.

He uses them freely in different parts of a sentence: he finishes his answers with an idiom, may use it in the middle of his answer, or may start his answer with an idiom paraphrasing the question (*Майкл, кто Вас прислал?* 'Michael, who sent you here?' – *Каким ветром занесло, да?* 'What wind brought me here, right?').

All in all, in this interview, Bohm used 22 idioms of different semantic and structural complexity (metaphoric phraseological fusions and phrase-

ological unities; proverbs and sayings; citations) that make up 100 words in total, that is, each his 10th word is part of an idiom:

- (1) *Каким ветром занесло?* 'What wind brought me here?',¹
- (2) *не в деньгах счастье* 'happiness is not in money',
- (3) *игра в одни ворота* 'one gate play',
- (4) *я не из воздуха беру* 'I do not take from the air',
- (5) *ты уж сильно сгущаешь краски* 'you really exaggerate, dramatize', lit: 'you condense colours',
- (6) *безапелляционно видеть ситуацию в черно-белом цвете* 'categorically/flatly see the situation in black and white',
- (7) *чушь полная!* 'complete nonsense!',
- (8) *подыгрывать кому-то* 'to play up (to)',
- (9) *а жалеют в России – значит, любят* 'and if in Russia they have pity – it means they love',
- (10) *служить власти – значит, петь их песню* 'to serve the authorities means to sing their song',
- (11) *это громко сказано* 'it's a big word' lit.: 'it is said loud',
- (12) *дело не в количестве, а в качестве* 'it is not a matter of quantity but of quality',
- (13) *смотреть свысока* 'to look down',
- (14) *авось пронесет* 'maybe it will blow over',
- (15) *напиться в хлам* 'to get really drunk',
- (16) *жестко поговорить* 'to talk tough',
- (17) *«Мы рождены, чтоб Кафку сделать былью», как саркастически здесь говорят* 'We were born to make Kafka come true', as they caustically say here' (a remake of the Soviet song "Мы рождены, чтоб сказку сделать былью" 'We were born to make a fairy-tale come true' where *Kafka*, the name of the German writer, whose topics were based on absurdity and fear, sounds similar to the Russian word *skazka* (сказка) 'fairy-tale'),
- (18) *«вражеская точка зрения»* 'the enemy's point of view' (Soviet mass media cliché),
- (19) *«американская военицина»* 'American military/war mongers' (Soviet mass media cliché),
- (20) *еще не вечер* 'it's not evening yet',
- (21) *настолько метко, что у них бледный вид* lit: 'so aptly that they have a pale appearance'.

¹ Idiomaticity of a phrase may be lost or partially lost while rendering its meaning and form into another language.

Michael Bohm also uses a great number of Russian set-expressions and phraseological word-collocations that indicate his advanced level of Russian as a foreign language which can already be called his second language:

- (1) *с точностью до наоборот* 'exactly the opposite',
- (2) *по собственной инициативе* 'on their own initiative',
- (3) *на сто процентов* 'for one hundred percent',
- (4) *это не дело* 'this is not good, it won't do',
- (5) *занимать нишу* 'occupy a niche',
- (6) *чувствовать себя в безопасности* 'feel safe' (lit.: 'feel oneself in security'),
- (7) *поддаваться на что-то* 'succumb to something',
- (8) *противоречить самому себе* 'contradict yourself'
- (9) *надо по любви* 'one should do it for love',
- (10) *просто душики* 'just darlings',
- (11) *иметь ввиду* 'to keep in mind'
- (12) *для кого как* 'it depends' (lit.: 'for whom how'),
- (13) *стоит ходить* 'worth going',
- (14) *он фанат этого дела* 'he is a fan of this business',
- (15) *между прочим* 'by the way',
- (16) *иметь кое-какие сбережения* 'to have some savings',
- (17) *у меня нет русского «авось»* 'I do not have the Russian "avos"' ('possibly/hopefully'),
- (18) *тьфу-тьфу!* (чтобы не сглазить) 'ptew – ptew! (not to jinx it); 'knock on/touch wood',
- (19) *он мне не конкурент* 'he is not a competitor to me',
- (20) *пожертвовать финансовым состоянием ради чего-то* 'donate financial condition for the sake of something', etc.

But is such intensive use of phraseological units normal or excessive?

It is not easy to answer this question. It should be admitted that: first, little is known about statistics of usage of phraseological units in different languages and styles and there is no average data about it so far; second, frequency use of PhUs is individual. However, the majority of idioms have low frequency (Баранов et al. 2016).

Intuitively native Russian speakers understand that Michael Bohm uses too many phraseological units in his talk discourse. To check the intuition about the excessive use of PhUs by Michael Bohm we analyzed for the sake of comparison a similar interview in Russian with a former Soviet/Russian and later British journalist Maria Slonim, the daughter of the well-known Soviet revolutionary and diplomat, who immigrated in 1974 to the USA and later to Great Britain. The interview was taken by another journalist from

the same paper *Moskovskij komsomolets* Elena Svetlova and published there on July, 29 2018 under the title *В Англии я немножко outsider* ('In England, I am a bit of an outsider') (Светлова 2018).

The analysis shows a **different verbal behavior of the native Russian interviewee**. There are 2128 words in the interview (174 words less than in the previous interview); in contrast to Michail Bomb, two thirds of the total number of words (1589) were uttered by the interviewee. Maria answered 30 questions, thus an average answer to each question includes 53 words – more than three times as many as Michael's answer. However, it is just natural as she speaks her native language and consequently she is more fluent and loquacious than Michael speaking a foreign language. Social factors including gender difference may also matter here.

However, the most interesting thing is that Maria Slonim being a Russian native speaker uses almost three times fewer idioms than Michael Bohm does.

In Maria's discourse, there are no proverbs but there are many phrasesemes and non-phraseological collocations that are common of Russian speech:

- (1) *переживания выпали на долю* 'experiences fell to the lot',
- (2) *сердце рвется от / сердце оборвалось* 'heart breaks from / heart breaks',
- (3) *что-то всколыхнется в душе* 'something stirs in the soul',
- (4) *страх сидит в подкорке* 'fear sits in the subcortex',
- (5) *репутация у меня немножечко теперь подмоченная* 'my reputation now is a little bit tarnished' (lit.: 'is slightly damped'),
- (6) *(в разговоре) находится (с тобой) на одной волне* '(in conversation) is on the same wavelength (with you)',
- (7) *граница проходит* 'the border passes',
- (8) *трубы проходят* 'the pipes pass',
- (9) *кампания развернулась* 'the campaign unfolded',
- (10) *цистит разыгрался* 'cystitis broke out',
- (11) *здороваться при встрече* 'say hello' lit. greeting when meeting people,
- (12) *переправляться на пароме* 'to ferry',
- (13) *прожить долгую и счастливую жизнь* 'to live a long and happy life',
- (14) *нарушить границу* 'to trespass the border',
- (15) *нарушить вид* 'to break the view',
- (16) *причинить урон* 'to cause damage',
- (17) *бросить курить* 'to stop smoking',
- (18) *отражаться на ком-то* 'to reflect on someone',

- (19) *произвести впечатление* 'to make an impression',
 (20) *крепкая водка* 'strong vodka',
 (21) *разве что* 'except that',
 (22) *ходи не ходи* 'doesn't matter if you go or don't go',
 (23) *у меня сто лет нет...* 'I haven't had a hundred years...',
 (24) *непонятно, куда они деваются* 'it is not clear where they disappear'.

2) Inadequate use of PhUs in talk discourse

Going back to the analysis of Michael Bohm's discourse, it should be mentioned that another peculiarity of his Russian is very subtle yet inadequate use of phraseological units. The cases of obvious deviations of PhUs usage are very rare. For example, the Russian phrase *иметь бледный вид* (lit. to have a pale look, appearance) is not shortened. The English verb 'to have' when used in constructions is often omitted in their Russian equivalents, but not in this idiom. The phrase uttered by Michael Bohm *Настолько метко, что у них бледный вид* (lit. So aptly that they pale look) is ungrammatical, though it is understandable.

The subtle **inadequacies** registered in M. Bohm's discourse are as follows:

- **establishing erroneous synonymity of PhUs**

Thus, the direct question *Майкл, кто Вас прислал?* 'Michael, who sent you here?' does not presuppose an answer in the form of a question, moreover, the answer with an idiom *Каким ветром занесло, да?* 'What wind brought me here, right?' is not a synonym to the journalist's question. The interviewer's question is more about CIS or any other spy organization, while Michael's paraphrased question is used to express surprise to the unexpected guest who according to the myth was brought by the winds. These questions are not synonymic, Michael obviously avoided the answer. His answer does not fit the context, but maybe it was done on purpose.

- **the use of a calque, loan translation, literal translation of an English PhU which is semantically transparent and similar to the Russian PhU**

An example of such subtle inadequate use of phraseological units in Russian discourse committed by M. Bohm is *Служить власти – значит, петь их песню* (lit. to serve the authorities is to sing their song). In Russian instead of *петь чью-то песню* 'to sing someone's song' we say either *петь дифирамбы*; *петь хвалу* 'to sing praises' or *плясать под чью-то дудку* (lit. to dance to someone's pipe). However, the meaning of the expression *петь чью-то песню* 'to sing someone's song' is understandable, transparent, easily deduced. It does not cause any problems in understanding. But it is not a Russian idiom, it is rather a calque, loan translation, literal translation

of an English idiom. (Cf.: an anti-apartheid song and single written and performed by British group UB40 in 1986: *We will fight for the right to be free / We will build our own society / And we will sing, we will sing / We will sing our own song*).

- **blending PhUs**

The third type of minor inadequacy in Russian phraseological units usage committed by M. Bohm is a blended new PhU that appeared in his speech. Thus, the idiom *безапелляционно видеть ситуацию в черно-белом цвете* (lit.: categorically see the situation in black and white) does not exist in Russian. It is a blending of two Russian idioms: *безапелляционно заявить* 'to declare categorically' and *видеть в черно-белом цвете* ('to see in black and white').

Another example of this kind of an error is the idiom *брать из воздуха* (lit. to take from air) in the meaning 'make up' is not registered in Russian dictionaries. We usually say in this context *брать с потолка* (lit. to take from the ceiling). There are some idioms with the word *воздух* 'air' in Russian but they have different meaning: *питаться воздухом* (lit. to eat air) 'to live on air'; *делать деньги из воздуха* (lit.: to make money out of air) 'to make money out of thin air'. Probably, this expression is a kind of blend of the two phraseological units *брать с потолка* (lit. to take from the ceiling) и *делать деньги из воздуха* (lit. to make money out of air).

- **incomplete semantization of PhU**

Still another, the fourth type, of minor inadequate use of Russian phraseological units in speech discourse that was made by M. Bohm is caused by incomplete semantization of PhU. Thus, the Russian PhU *ещё не вечер* (lit. it is not evening yet) has the following meanings: 1. 'not all is lost yet, there are still chances and opportunities', and 2. 'it is not old age yet'. Neither of them fits the context where Bohm speaks about feeling safe in Moscow and that he was not aggressively attacked in the darkness by anyone.

However, this optimistic phrase *ещё не вечер* 'not all is lost, there are still chances, opportunities' may be interpreted here as a sign of his humor, irony, and thus be regarded as communicatively successful.

5. Possible reasons for M. Bohm's deviations in the use of Russian idioms

Reasons for phraseological errors in discourse, especially in a foreigner's discourse, may be plentiful. However, so far little is known about the use of phraseological units in discourse. The pioneering work in this field has

been done so far by Anita Naciscione (2010) in *Stylistic Use of Phraseological Units in Discourse*, yet many aspects of this problem remain to be unclear. As a result, the issues of reasons for phraseological errors and adequate teaching of phraseological units remain to be *terra incognita*.

The detected deviations in the use of Russian phraseological units in the discourse of an American native speaker may be related to the following major factors:

1. The excessive use of PhUs in M. Bohm's talk discourse may be accounted for:

• **the systemic factor**

Some scholars note that PhUs are used in Russian more frequently than in some other languages (Ласкарева, Федотова 2008: 315–328), and M. Bohm takes into account this information. However there are no reliable data about comparative frequency of usage of phraseological units in different languages or any reliable data about the use phraseological units in different types of discourse in Russian.

• **pragmatic reasons**

M. Bohm is a foreigner, which is why his desire not to be taken as an alien, to sound friendly, impressive, next to a native speaker in his talk discourse is especially strong. To make the communicators' distance closer he intuitively makes a wide use of phraseological units that serve this function. Moreover, idioms and other phraseological units are powerful linguistic means that can leave a lasting impression on the hearer. They also help to continue the conversation, "keep the ball rolling". And then, they help a foreigner to match a native speaker in economy, expressive flexibility and accuracy.

Though phraseological units create the desired friendly atmosphere (the journalist notes that after the first answer to his question, and it was an idiom *Каким ветром занесло?* – they started using the informal pronoun *ты* instead of *Вы* referring to each other), the excessive use of idioms and clichés finally create the impression that Michael is **not sincere**. He hides behind his idioms, becomes invisible, makes the speaker draw inferences and be responsible for them. In the long run, the expressive, informative and appealing functions of the speaker's discourse become weak. As George Orwell (1946) wrote in his essay *Politics and the English Language*, "By using stale metaphors, similes, and idioms, you save much mental effort, at the cost of leaving your meaning vague, not only for your reader but for yourself". Finally, as a communicator, Michael Bomb becomes less interesting than he could have been.

2. The reasons for major and minor errors in phraseological units use in M. Bohm's talk discourse may be indicative of his knowledge shortfalls accounted for "insufficient learning" of these complex language units which, in turn, is due to "insufficient lexicographic information" about PhUs in dictionaries.

Linguists today are well aware that phraseological units are not self-contained language units independent of the context where they are used, and that the appropriate use of a PhU in discourse should take into account prototypical precedent texts with it and different socio-cultural nuances of its usage.

But the lexicographic practice is still lagging behind. Yet foreign language learners still rely predominately on the dictionary data about PhUs which give only some general information about their semantic, structural and stylistic characteristics. Rich linguistic and cultural information about phraseological units is very insufficient there. PhUs are usually decontextualized there or have limited verbal illustration; the degree and boundaries of their variation are usually not presented; etymological information can be found only in specialized dictionaries. The situation is improving with new computer technology but not quickly enough.

6. Conclusion

Though a relatively patchy picture of the phraseological errors found in the Russian speech of a single English speaking foreign language learner has been presented here, nevertheless a number of interesting findings are revealed.

First of all, for a foreign language learner, even at the advanced level of his/her language proficiency, using phraseological units in discourse is a kind of a shibboleth – a speech pattern that distinguishes one language group of people from others. The conducted research revealed the excessive and slightly inadequate usage of Russian phraseological units by a native American and near-native Russian speaker. The cases of subtle inadequacies in PhUs usage by the foreigner indicate their incomplete semantization which may be due to insufficient lexicographic information about PhUs in dictionaries, and the inclination of the speaker to blend them in speech or to calque from his native language.

The mechanism of PhUs use in discourse, their frequency of usage and variation still need further investigation as well as more comprehensive lexicographic presentation.

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Errores fraseológicos en el discurso hablado de un extranjero y sus razones

Resumen

El objetivo del artículo es revelar los tipos de errores en el uso de modismos rusos realizados por un hablante nativo de inglés con un nivel avanzado de competencia en lengua rusa, así como descubrir las razones de estos errores. El autor afirma que el hablante en estudio, un periodista, tiene un buen conocimiento de la fraseología rusa y una gran habilidad para usar estas unidades léxicas en su discurso. Sin embargo, el autor argumenta que sutiles fallas e insuficiencias en el uso de algunas unidades fraseológicas rusas reveladas en el discurso ruso casi perfecto por parte del hablante nativo de inglés se deben a la interferencia de la lengua materna y a la semantización insuficiente de las unidades fraseológicas rusas, que están en parte relacionadas con los datos lexicográficos incompletos sobre su semántica, pragmática y uso.