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Semantics of Idioms and Cultural Adaptation

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Abstract. The article deals with the peculiarities of such a linguistic phenomenon as semantic shift on the example of phraseological units or idioms in the modern English language. The research work is aimed at the analysis of a linguistic and cultural values of the phraseological fund in the modern English language and identifying the key reasons influencing the change in the semantics of stable phrases in the speech of modern British politicians. The article is based on a complex methodology combining such research methods as comparative analysis, linguistic and cultural commentary, the descriptive analysis, the authors examine specific spheres areas in which UK politicians use phraseological units; point out the reasons of certain phraseological units using; provide detailed information on the key transformations in the semantics of stable expressions under the influence of external factors. To sum it all, the authors come to the conclusion that the high degree of metaphorization is typical for the British politicians aimed at making influence on the target audience and the transformation of the perspective characteristic of modern English culture leads to new social priorities in the life of society, which is also reflected in the language.

Key words: language and culture, idioms, change of meaning, political discourse, transformational processes

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Семантика фразеологизмов в процессе лингвокультурной адаптации

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Аннотация. Целью исследования является проведение лингвокультурологического анализа фразеологического фонда современного английского языка и выявление ключевых причин, влияющих на изменение семантики устойчивых словосочетаний в речи современных политических деятелей Великобритании. На основе комплексной методики, объединяющей такие методы исследования, как сравнительно-сопоставительный анализ, лингвокультурологический комментарий, метод дискриптивного анализа, выявляются ключевые сферы, в которых политические деятели Великобритании используют фразеологические единицы; устанавливаются причины применения тех или иных фразеологических единиц; выявляются ключевые трансформации в семантике устойчивых выражений под влиянием внешних факторов. В заключение авторы приходят к выводу о высокой степени метафоризации высказываний



политических деятелей Великобритании с целью воздействовать на целевую аудиторию и свойственной современной английской культуре трансформации ракурса на новые социальные приоритеты в жизни общества, что также находит свое отражение в языке.

Ключевые слова: лингвокультурология, фразеологическая единица, изменение значения, политический дискурс, трансформационные процессы

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Introduction

The problem of contact interactions has been considered as one of the hottest to discuss in modern linguistics. Language variants' peculiar features have been analyzed in works by J. Baghana who investigates the aspects of French being influenced by African local languages and cultures [Baghana et al., 2018]. In works by T. Voloshina of great importance are the processes of globalization and indigenization which influence the English language structure creolized to the need of local Nigerian languages [Baghana, Voloshina, 2019]. Language and cultural adaptation of French on the territory of Ivory Coast is the main aspect in works by Ya. Glebova [Baghana et al., 2021a]. Y. Blazhevich analyses the changing in English and French in Cameroon and stresses the influence of bilingual society in language adaptation process [Baghana et al., 2021a].

The scientific problem lies, on the one hand, in the need of a complex model analysis of English being the leading mean of international communication, and, on the other hand, in the importance of modern meaning-changing processes in modern English being used under the influence of social reasons.

Such lexical units as idioms can be adapted to the new language environment as well as other lexical structures, which is dictated by the elements of local cultures and historical development process. The aim of the research work is to reveal semantic changes of idioms, exactly to follow the peculiar aspects of English idioms in political discourse.

Methods

The methodology of the research work includes general scientific methods and methods of linguistic research. The following methods are used as of major importance: comparative analysis which allows to reveal similarities and dissimilarities in the languages and cultures; historical analysis which helps to trace the meaning of idioms according to times transformations; descriptive method which helps to describe main structural elements of words, their combinations and functioning in the speech.

Results and discussion

The relevance of the work lies in the analysis of English idioms being the part of modern political discourse. Since idioms are one of the expression means and are widely used in the artistic sphere, their presence in politics is also permissible. In addition, the translation of idiomatic expressions can be difficult. This is caused by the variability of the translation and its further reinterpretation, pointing the specific meaning due to cultural adaptation process. Often idiom elements in speech are misunderstood or subjected to speculation by translators, linguists and politicians. In order to avoid such situations, it is necessary to know well not only the language, but also the historical aspects of English-speaking countries.

The practical part of the research work is made on the basis of politicians' speeches of UK and American leaders. The aspects of the research work deal with the analysis of the theoretical aspect and specific features of English idioms; identifying the place of English idioms in political

discourse; presenting examples of English idioms in the speech of politicians and heads of the UK and the USA; identifying the specific features idioms use.

Idioms: theoretical ground aspects

In the English tradition, an idiom is a set expression that has a national identity (phrases, proverbs, sayings, exclamations, some clichés and even onomatopoeic words). From a theoretical point of view, an idiom is an expression which meaning cannot be deduced from the definitions of its constituent parts.

Extra-linguistic prototypes (complicated internal form) include extra linguistic factors. The origin of many idioms is connected with religious prescriptions and rules that the British strictly had to observe. An example of such an idiom is the phrase “in a month of Sundays”, which means that something is not destined to come true.

The idea of rainy and cloudy weather in England has also caused idioms to arise. The common phrase “to rain cats and dogs”, which means “to pour like a bucket (about rain)”, appeared in the XVIII century, when gutters were built poorly on the paved streets of Britain, which during heavy rains turned them into rivers that washed away everything in their path, including poor animals.

The analysis of idioms proved that English often used lexical units related to the sea and fishing. It brought not only a big catch and beckoned with long journeys, but also hid the dangers to life. The geographical location of the UK largely explains the abundance of idioms with a maritime theme. You can also find words and expressions used by sailors and fishermen many centuries ago, which today have acquired a different meaning.

The expression “to pour oil on troubled waters” appeared due to a maritime belief — in order to prevent a storm, it was necessary to pour oil on the surface of the sea. Nowadays, the idiom is used in the meaning of “to stop a quarrel”.

Idioms in political discourse

Political discourse appeared when politics itself. The beginning was laid in ancient Greece, in the time of Cicero and Aristotle, who emphasized rhetoric in achieving specific goals. The use of idioms was considered unacceptable for a scientific language due to inaccuracies associated with ambiguity. This view was revised in XX century when the idiom became an integral element of speech.

Political discourse is aimed either at obtaining or retaining power, and persuasion is its effective tool. Persuasion becomes especially important during election campaigns aimed at making a positive image in eyes of the voters. Politicians need audience’s attention either positive or negative. Voters trust politicians’ speeches especially promising positive life changes. Often politicians use idioms in their speech. Idioms present a specific language tool to make the speech brighter and fool of stylistic devices. Quite often politicians use metaphors making influence on viewers. Language and cultural cooperation analysis help politicians to make influence on people. Such texts can attract people directly related to politics or interested in it. However, in order to involve a larger number of the public, politicians resort to using idioms that are understandable and accessible to all segments of the population.

The use of idioms in political discourse remained in doubt for a long time because they were associated with colloquial informal speech. Listening to such statements from people who are seriously engaged and analyzing politics, the authority of one or another political leader decreased, as it showed his frivolity and incompetence. The modification of idioms is characteristic of political discourse. A significant number of idioms are subject to changes during the speeches of politicians and heads of state. This is due to the fact that politicians are trying to play their internal form according to a given political context, making idioms more expressive. The most widespread is the expansion of idioms meaning while their contraction is not characteristic of electoral discourse. The transformations of idioms are not lexicalized, they are created by individuals.

The practical part of the research work presents idioms use in politicians’ speeches in different spheres:



Politics and Boxing :

“That’s one of the things that actually gives us the ability to punch above our weight in the world. It gives us influence in the world” [Prime Minister's..., 2014].

This is the speech by David Cameron who is presenting his speech about the weight of British nation in this world. The verb “to punch” is most often used to describe a boxer's punch. In this case, the idiom “to punch about one's weight” means “to participate in an event or competition that is perceived as going beyond its capabilities”.

Politics and Cricket:

“I actually worked for the man who was sent by Margaret Thatcher, would you believe it, to bat for Britain in Brussels” [The best..., 2023].

This expression was taken from the speech by Nick Clegg who really worked for Margaret Thatcher. The assistant uses idiom “to bat for” to express the fight of Britain in Brussels. The noun “a bat” is translated as “bat” which is directly related to cricket. In this expression, the idiom “bat for someone” means “to stand up for” or “to support someone who needs help”.

Politics and Baseball

“We stepped up to the plate and put the good of the country first even though it meant working with people we disagreed with” [Nick Clegg's..., 2010].

This is the part of Nick Clegg speech. He mentioned they got down to business.

Sometimes British politicians compare the actions of an opponent with children's games:

“So don’t let them tell you that the only choice is between two old parties who have been playing pass the parcel with your government for 65 years now – making the same promises, breaking the same promises” [Michael Gove..., 2019].

In English, the expression “play pass the parcel” means the game action “pass to another”. In this case, the idiom “playing pass the parcel” means “avoiding responsibility”.

Politics and Money:

Many statements related to business and accounting are firmly rooted in political rhetoric. “There are MPs who flipped one property to the next, buying property, paid by you, the taxpayer, and then they would do the properties up, paid for by you, and pocket the difference in personal profit. They got away scot-free” [Nick Clegg..., 2015b].

By this speech Nick Clegg, being MP, stressed the shift of one property to another, this process went unpunished.

Politics and natural phenomena

“They're all chasing the same rainbows such as social cohesion, global warming, containing terrorism, and rightly so” [David Cameron..., 2015].

This is a part of David Cameron speech. He is trying to achieve the impossible, namely social cohesion, preventing global warming, deterring terrorism, and this is right. In this speech, the expression “be chasing rainbows” means “trying to do something that is unrealistic”. In the idiom, it is the rainbow that is used, since it is a natural phenomenon that cannot be reached or touched.

Various aspects of British policy are metaphorically regarded as a “road”. This expression is used metaphorically modeling the politics when talking about the economy, describing the migration process, and promising not to find easy ways. Consequently, the road symbolizes action and movement:

“Your decision made sure that the difficult choices needed to get us back on track were taken, but taken with compassion and a sense of fairness” [Nick Clegg..., 2015a].

Nick Clegg provides confidence that the difficult choices needed to get them back. Literally, the idiom “to back on track” means “to return, to be on the road again”. In this case, this expression can be interpreted as “a return to what was conceived or planned”.

“If you're trying to persuade people to invest trust again, which was Mary's question, into politicians, then it's just not good enough to just talk the talk and not walk the walk” [Nick Clegg..., 2015a].

In the above-mentioned expressions, we are literally talking about a walk. As an idiom, “walk the walk” means “to confirm something with your actions, not with words”.

Idiomatic expressions are widely used by UK politicians. Whatever the issue is under discussion, its seriousness can be diluted with the help of this lexical unit. Politicians widely use idioms related to completely different spheres of life. This makes their speech unique and memorable. Expressions familiar to people make it possible to involve listeners in the information provided. Idiomatic expressions can be used during election campaigns, public speeches and statements, meetings and political events.

Political language is between two poles. On the one hand, it is defined functionally; and, on the other hand, it is subjected to the jargon of a specific lexical group. Idiomatic expressions of the English language can be understood by translating them in the literal sense, in phraseological units, most often only a figurative meaning is possible.

Conclusions

Idioms are the elements of everyday communication, they present the linguistic structure which is able to protect cultural heritage. Modern idioms are the integral part of modern political discourse and are used by politicians for making special influence to the public. Political discourse is a special speech style of politicians, implemented during election campaigns, public speeches and meetings. Political discourse is a set of all speech acts by public policy, sanctified by tradition and proven by experience. Despite the strictness of the political discourse, it allows the use of emotionally colored words and expressions, in many cases these are idioms. The reasons for using idioms in the speech of political figures are: attracting the attention to the public and the opponent, presenting information in a simplified version, involving the masses in political processes.

Idioms that are used in English political discourse correspond to different spheres of public life, but mainly they correspond to the topic of sport, stressing the desire of the British people to many sport games, on the one hand, and paying special attention to comparing politics and the idea of competitiveness, on the other hand. Idioms help politicians to attract people attention to other life spheres as money and natural phenomena. According to the research work one of the most important features of idioms used in speeches of politicians is the meaning-change which is due to the influence of social factors: migrations, economic and political crisis, poverty.

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