

Ornythonym component and phraseological meaning

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Abstract. The paper represents the results of the research into phraseological and paremiological units with ornythonym component. According to the level of complexity of their semantic structure phraseological units are divided into 3 groups. Detecting the status of ornythonym components one should refer to this classification, because these two phenomena, i.e. the level of semantic complexity of the phraseological unit semantic structure and status of its component parts, are closely related to each other. Within the framework of this research studying symbolic meanings different birds are endowed in the English linguistic culture is given appropriate attention too, because most ornythonym components of phraseological units realize their symbolic meaning. Appearance, behavior, relations with other birds and different other characteristics of birds also serve as basis for metaphoric meaning realized in phraseology.

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Introduction

Phraseological and paremiological units are a special part of lexicology of any language reflecting historical and cultural experience of the ethnos in the brightest way. They are endowed with a different, much more complicated meaning than lexical units. We use here the term phraseology in its broad meaning which means its encompassing paremiology also.

Paremiology is a part of folklore, connected with mythological perception of the world, which in its turn is related to ritual collective experience of people speaking the language. People tend to classify their accumulated experience, then draw some conclusions and generalize this experience. Everything is assessed from the axiological angle, ultimately, it is codified. This experience is very important and up to date for each language community.

Phraseological meaning is known as not to be deducible from the meanings of the component parts. Phraseologists have debated much about the status of phraseological unit components, representing two opposing viewpoints: according to the first one, component parts of phraseological units completely lose their word status becoming similar to morphemes [1:150]; according to the second, phraseological unit component parts are words with special status (partially losing their semantic meaning) [2: 14]. We adhere to the second opinion on this matter.

A well-known Russian scholar A.V. Kunin writes about the following statuses of phraseological

unit components: 1) real words, components used in their direct meaning; 2) potential words, components with weakened lexical and syntactic meaning; 3) former words, components with transferred meaning; 4) ghost-words, components not existing as a separate word in the language [3: 40].

Though being not deducible from the meanings of the component parts, as it was mentioned, phraseological meaning has peculiar bonds with the meaning of component parts. The status of the latter also depends on the character of these bonds which in their turn play an important role in the classification of phraseological units elaborated by A.V. Kunin, who singles out the following groups of phraseological units: idiomatisms, idiophraseomatisms and phraseomatisms. Phraseomatisms are further subdivided into: 1) word combinations with reformed meaning the semantic complexity of which is connected with the fact of their meaning being not the sum of their component parts meaning, but something new; 2) word combinations with additional specifying meaning; 3) word combinations denoting symbolic gestures; 4) proverbs with direct meaning; 5) word combinations with phraseomatically bound meaning [3: 29].

Current research is aimed at detecting the status of ornythonym components of phraseological units. Since birds as flying creatures have always attracted people's attention, they invented a large number of legends, myths in which birds are endowed with some symbolic meaning [4]. The fact that myths are "non-critically perceiving stereotypes of public consciousness" [5: 1135] designates the role

of these symbolic meanings. People also observed birds' behavior and way of life scrupulously and tried to see some relations between them and changes in the nature, weather and sometimes even in the fate of people.

Materials and methods

Empirical material of the current research – phraseological and paremiological units with an ornythonym component – are extracted from different phraseographic and paremiographic sources of the English language.

Phraseology could witness different approaches to its study. Semantic and semiotic approaches focus on the phraseological meaning structure bounding it with the etymology of phraseological images. Great interest to deep comprehension of paremiology as a system of metasigns of folklore and phraseology is seen in the works of such scholars as A. Kunin [3], V. Mokienko [6], N. Amosova [7], W. Mieder [8].

Studying the world image reflected in phraseology, conceptual (thematic) method, has been a traditional approach to its study, but it still remains up to date. (A. Baranov, D. Dobrovolskii [9], O. Borscheva [10], V. Bornstein [11]). Some modern studies demonstrate application of mathematical model and corpus linguistics within this approach (E. Laporte [12], Ch. Winnie [13]).

Structural and comparative methods are very often combined with some of the aforementioned ones (E. Arsenteva [14], (Davletbaeva [15], A. Dundes [16]).

The main goal of this work is to detect the status of ornythonym components of phraseological units. Accordingly, the main methods used here are lingua-cultural, semiotic, componential and structural-semantic ones.

Main body

Raven (crow). In the culture of ancient Egypt raven (crow) symbolizes destruction, evil, while as ravens' couple means happy family life. In West European traditions this bird is viewed as the herald of the evil, war or death. In Celtic mythology the raven is associated with death, darkness and war that is related to this bird's habit of eating carrion. Usually there used to be a lot of ravens in battlefields where dead bodies are left.

Aforementioned symbolic meanings of the component *raven (crow)* is realized in the PUs *A crow on the thatch, soon death lifts the latch* and *There is wisdom in a raven's head*. It is logical that the components under analysis here are used in their direct meaning, as the units they are included in, according to Kunin's classification, are proverbs with

direct meaning. So the status of ornythonym component is that of a real word.

Within the same culture ravens are also endowed with supernatural power and prophecy, e.g.: *to have raven's knowledge* 'to have the talent of prophecy or soothsaying'. All the components of this unit were abstracted from their semantic meaning and the word combination acquired metaphorical meaning, which is based on the symbol of this ornythonym in the given linguistic culture. Thus the component *raven* acquires here the status of a former word and it plays the major role in forming the bright image of this phraseological unit. This process of phraseologization proves that the unit can be referred to the group of idiophraseomatisms.

Dove. Doves were known as birds having special ability to orientate themselves in space, therefore from the ancient times they were used as letter-carriers. Also due to this ability of it the dove was domesticated.

As to the symbols the dove was associated with, they all were ameliorative ones nearly in all linguistic cultures. Mostly dove is a symbol of peace, love, hope, cleanness (innocence), etc. It is probably connected with the legend, which runs that during the flood Noah sent a raven to find out whether water was going down, but it did not return, then a dove was sent, which returned with a branch of olive – the news about the end of the flood. In some English phraseological units one can witness utilization of the component *dove* with this symbolic meaning, e.g.: *as harmless as a dove; be wise as serpent and innocent as a dove*. In both the examples, which represent idiophraseomatisms, the component *dove* is partially abstracted from its semantic meaning, so becoming a potential word. These phraseological units also evidence ornythonym component being the basis for forming the phraseological image.

However, the same component within the same language may be used in pejorative evaluative meaning, e.g.: *Priests and pigeons make foul houses*. This proverb (phraseomatism, according to the classification we use) is an allusion hinting at immoral behaviour of some priests [17]. The component *pigeon* is used here in its direct meaning, in the status of a real word, but as the basis for playing upon different meanings of the word *foul*: 'dirty', on the one hand, and 'dishonorable', 'nasty', on the other hand.

The proverb *Eagles do not breed doves* denoting 'stately parents' children cannot be average people' is also an example of idiophraseomatism. The component *doves* is utilized here metaphorically in the meaning 'pathetic', 'pitiful' and has the status of a former word. The metaphor is based on the

positions of the two birds in the wild environment: eagles are predators, doves – their preys.

Cuckoo. For people of different linguistic cultures a cuckoo was the embodiment of a soul, Sybil. This bird is known for its peculiarity of laying its egg in other birds' nests, so those who put responsibility for their children on other people are called cuckoo. In the English-speaking world there exist a legend calling to believe that the number this bird cuckoos means a number of years left for a young girl listening to it to get married.

The proverb *Cuckoo in the nest* 'an unexpected guest, a thing in a wrong place, an extramarital child' (idiophrasematism) demonstrates realization of the symbolic meaning of this ornythonym component resulting from the "lifestyle" or behavior of this bird. The inner form of this unit being transparent the component *cuckoo* has the status of potential word. The English phraseological unit *Cloud-cuckoo land* 'the world of dreams, that cannot be in the reality' originated from the play "The Birds" by Aristophanes, a Greek playwright. The phraseological unit is referred to idiomatism the imagery of which does not anyhow ensue from the symbolic meaning of the ornythonym component *cuckoo*, which can be qualified as a former word.

Owl. In ancient Egypt and in many other countries the owl was a symbol of death and darkness. Nowadays it is a symbol of wisdom, shrewdness and erudition [4]. However, the idiophrasematism *as wise as an owl* is used when speaking about a person with no sign of wisdom, the unit is endowed with ironic emotive seme. The component *owl* here is partially abstracted from its semantic meaning, becoming a potential word. It realizes the meaning antonymic to its symbolic one. Paremiological unit *the owl of ignorance lays the egg of pride*, idiophrasematism according to the level of semantic complexity, also represents the use of *owl* as a component in the same meaning as in the previous example. Due to its collocation with the component *ignorance* revealing the meaning of *owl* in this unit, ornythonym component has the status of a potential word. The component *owl* as a component of the unit *night owl* (idiophrasematism) is used in its symbolic meaning connected with the bird's behavior of being active during night rather than daytime. The ornythonym component is used in the status of a former word.

Sparrow. In different linguistic cultures the sparrow is endowed with different symbolic meanings. However the images observed in the English phraseology are based on the bird's small size, e.g.: *A sparrow in the hand is better than a pigeon on the roof*. The meaning of this paremiological unit, qualified as an idiophrasematism

expression is 'better to have something small, of less importance now, than to be promised about being given smth bigger or more important later'. Here the component *sparrow* is fully abstracted from its direct meaning, so becoming a former word. The phraseological unit *eat like a sparrow* (idiophrasematism) also utilizes the ornythonym in the same metaphoric meaning as the previous unit. The status of the component *sparrow* is designated as a former word.

Magpie. The magpie is a very colourful and bright bird, so its symbolic meaning is also various. According to one of the legends the magpie loves all bright and glittering things. Many peoples believed that the magpie could herald oncoming danger. In western traditions this bird's image was associated with rumor and witchcraft. Idiophrasematism *Chatter like a magpie* exemplifies the use of the component *magpie* in one of these symbolic meanings thus having the status of a former word.

Conclusion

More than one hundred phraseological and paremiological units with ornythonym component denoting either a domestic bird, or a wild one were analyzed using the abovementioned methods, though we give here only the examples with ornythonym components – names of wild birds. The results of the research show 6,7% of all phraseological units with ornythonym component under analysis are idiomatists. Nearly in all idiomatists ornythonym component has the status of a former word. It is quite logical, because they have the highest level of semantic complexity. Lack of ghost words not only within the given examples, but in all the empirical material is connected with the nature of the ornythonym component being in active use in the contemporary English language.

73,3% of phraseological units with ornythonym component we analyzed prove to be idiophrasematists. In 63,3% of them ornythonym component is used in the status of a former word, in 36,7% - a potential word. The given numbers witness in the favour of the fact that mostly components of idiophrasematists undergo full abstraction from their semantic meaning.

Praseomatists make up 6,7% of all factual material of the current research. In all these units ornythonym component is used in its direct meaning, i.e. in the status of a real word.

When used in all three statuses, that of a former word, potential word or real word, ornythonym components serve the basis for a bright phraseological image. Most of the images we analyze (66,6 %) utilize the symbolic meaning each bird is endowed with in the linguistic culture. The rest of the

images exploit different characteristics of birds as their size, colour, behaviour, relations with other birds or in rare cases it may properties of some bird-personage from a well-known fiction work. These properties which have not developed into a symbolic meaning were used in forming phraseological images in 33,4% of units we analyzed.

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