Why do we understand idioms? (Based on the English idioms with proper name)

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Abstract. The research indicates cognitive and semiotic statuses of proper name in English idioms such as rob Peter to pay Paul, Hobson's choice, every Tom, Dick and Harry. Interaction principles between idiom with proper name and its context are formulated. The main directions of contextualization in terms of discourse are determined. The author's classification of idioms with proper name based on myth types is presented. Idiomatic contexts with proper names are considered as mythological discourse components. Due to that point, the algorithm of analyzing and understanding idioms with proper name is defined. The idiom with proper name schematic representation based on a circle is shown. By the given scheme, dialectical relationship between proper name, that is cognitive center of idioms, and, its internal predicate is observed. This approach explains linguistic breakthrough, i.e. the concept ingoing via new direction. The hermeneutical analysis of proper name functioning in idioms proves that proper name interpretation should be started in discourses. That is because of proper name tendency to be originated in its mythological function in panchronic discourses.

Introduction

The category *understanding* is an integral part of semiotic space of inner world of a human being. As a specific form of person's mental reflection, *understanding* represents a great interest not only for psychologists but for linguists as well. In this connection, the subject of the research is verbalization of understanding in human language space, and idioms with proper names, particularly. Due to great difficulties in understanding idioms and, as a consequence, in learning them, the question to include this linguistic category in educational programmes of colleges, language courses or not to include is still open. The aim of the article is to offer the author's interpretation and classification of English idioms with proper names based on myths types [1, pp. 119-124], to show the way to understand idioms, persuading everyone dealing with a foreign language teaching or learning not to neglect this extremely important cluster but to study and use it extensively. Moreover, the given author's approach to understand idioms with proper names opens wide opportunities for further discoveries not only in linguistics, in representing knowledge in mythological terms of language and speech analysis, which is the sphere of anthropologists, linguists and political scientists, but in history, in regional geography, in the course on intercultural communication, in theory and practice translation, etc.

Materials and methods

The research materials are more than 300 English idioms with proper name from phraseological dictionaries [2, 3, 4, 5], from works of fiction, films and newspapers. The research is focused on phraseological identification method [6]. Various aspects of idioms interpretation in discourse based on the hermeneutical tenet on part and integer are considered. The terms "idiom" and "phraseologism" are considered as permutable.

The main part

Language is only a small part of a holistic phenomenon that a person tries to know. Being engaged in acts of communication, participants generate lots of utterances which are perceived and understood by them. Hence, it is important to inquire how a person understands and conceptualizes reality. Why is it possible for a human being to identify and elicit the needed piece of information from all, stored in memory, hic and nunc?

Interest to the understanding phenomenon hasn't been subsided since the XIX century, being the subject of philosophy, logic, psychology, pedagogy, sociology. The German philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer [7], emphasizing the diversity of the concept, indicates the necessity to concentrate on the context in which understanding is under consideration, as understanding is operably-historical fulfillment. The person who is eager to understand, has to "figure out" the meaning constantly. Once some meaning of the text becomes clear, he starts preliminary meaning 'canter' on the whole text. Understanding the text meaning is that preliminary 'canter', which is subjected by further constant rethink.

There is still no unity in opinion in the understanding criteria determination. The Russian philosopher A.A. Brudnyi [8] defines 'understanding' as "the knot binding together knowledge and

communication". The Russian psychologist M.S. Rogovin [9] emphasizes that "human's mind tends to reflect the objects or phenomena of interest primarily by relating them to a wider range of phenomena, including them in the system of already studied consistent patterns and reality relations. In other words, the information which is understood relates to the already existing system of knowledge. This conclusion to some extent echoes with N. Chomsky's idea [10, 11] on language and mind. According to the scientist's point of view, the ability to structure sentences is an innate part of human's genetic program. People are not aware of the structural principles, as are not aware of the most biological and cognitive features.

A brief excursus into the mentioned above theories on *understanding* has been done to illustrate that *understanding* is a multifaceted issue, still open for future thorough research. Cognitive linguistics is interpretative by nature. Consequently, it is necessary to take into consideration the understanding phenomenon peculiarities while accomplishing lexical-nominative act analysis. However, complete understanding means to 'embrace' the Universe in its totality. No doubt, it is hardly can be done. There is always something that can't be fixed in the world. In the given article, we need the term understanding fragmentarily, when dealing with the problem on idioms interpretation. The question is why we should understand the idiom 'the mark of Cain' as stigma of crime, in general, and, particularly, the proper name Cain, as a criminal, a monster.

The Russian philosopher, S. Bulgakov [12], stated that senseless and meaningless names in their genesis do not exist. For further reasoning, several examples will be illustrated.

1.   Fabio Capello has not performed with distinction but he is facing up to some easy issues, such as the basis on which John Terry should regain the England captaincy, so we can only hope he summons *the wisdom of Solomon* in dealing with whether Jack Wilshere and Andy Carroll ... [13].

2.   The Central Bank needed *the wisdom of Solomon* when it drafted a plan to decide which creditors should get priority for debt payments that embattled borrowers can afford to make. The result has pitted the banks as mortgage lenders against unsecured creditors, especially credit ... [14].

3.   Boo! Leveson wants us *to cross the Rubicon* [15].

4.   Executives '*crossed the Rubicon* with forgery that hid losses' [16].

Obviously, the attention of the addresser/addressee is focused on the idiom the wisdom of Solomon (1, 2), to cross the Rubicon (3, 4), in general, and on the proper names Solomon, Rubicon, in particular, as they are something more

than just names. By legends, Solomon, the third Jewish king (965-928 BC) was famous by his unique wisdom and justice. According to the Bible, Solomon was endowed with wisdom that nobody had in the world [17]. To cross the Rubicon means to do something that inevitably commits one to a certain course of action. It will have very important results, which cannot be changed later. By legends, Julius Caesar, a famous Roman statesman and politician, with his army, crossed the river Rubicon. The crossing involved him in a civil war in 49 B.C. [18].

Thus, the proper names Solomon and Rubicon encompass the mythological knowledge about some legendary personalities. The knowledge is expressed by legends and can't be verified. This type of knowledge gives us the right to state about proper names cognitive specificity in idioms. However, not all features, inherent to the individual are to be considered. It must be the only one predicate which specifies exactly the owner, the doer of action.

Till now, there is a point of view (Amosova, Dobrovolskiy, Baranov) [19, 20] in phraseology that all idiom components have equal parts in its formation. Nevertheless, one can hardly claim about it when dealing with idioms with proper name. It is possible to make more radical conclusion, viz. to acknowledge about cognitive center, the center around which specific mythological knowledge is organized. A proper name in idioms is that magic point where illocution and proposition are in one. And more, proper name, being the cognitive center of the idiom, irradiates on the rest components of the idiom by its symbolic meaning.

The symbolic meaning formation is an arguable issue in linguistics. The Russian linguist, Arutyunova N.D. [21] stated about image possibility to become a symbol. Due to the fact that a thing can have constant features, the thing becomes the feature symbol, expressed by its attribute. Image selection has been implemented by centuries by metaphorical transfer on the base of associative representations. Nonetheless, linguists will have to analyze at least two problems on this issue: the process of symbol 'ingoing' into metaphor, and symbol meaning acquisition by the image, comprised in idioms. As for the given research, the question is whether the proper name Tom in the idiom 'peeping Tom' is the symbol of curiosity, or, in the idiom 'not to know sb. from Adam', Adam is the symbol of the first man, Judas in the idiom 'the kiss of Judas' is the symbol of betray, Pyrrhus in the idiom 'Pyrrhic victory' is the symbol of hollow victory, etc. Relating to the symbolic issue, several idioms with proper name examples will be illustrated.

1.   You will bear *the mark of Cain* for the rest of your life for your cruelty to her children, said John [22].

2.   He had fled in panic and now returned to England hoping to clear his name. Whatever happened could be no worse that living under *the mark of Cain*, in terror and concealment, as he had been [22].

3.   The disproportionate influence of negative comments over positive ones is well known. One error, one misjudgment, one infelicitous remark and you can be branded with the mark of Cain [23].

4.   In the public mind the sex offender carries *the mark of Cain*. Incurable and irredeemable, his perversion casts him as the permanent outsider, a threat to society who can never be reintroduced. [24].

While analyzing the given excerpts from different sources, special attention is paid to the idiom 'the mark of Cain' and to the proper name Cain. Why is the noun "mark" used together with this proper name? In this particular case, the correlation between symbol and mythological discourse is clear. By the Bible, 'the mark of Cain' mainly refers to the curse that God put on Cain, the firstborn son of <u>Adam and Eve</u> who killed his brother Abel. "God declared to Cain, - Now you are under a curse …. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth. If anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over." [25, p.280]. Thus, the proper name Cain encompasses the events based on the myth. Predicative (evaluative) meaning is clearly observed, i.e. to be cursed (because of Ralph's ill-treatment toward Deborah's children (1, 2), because of the offence toward people with other point of view or orientation (3, 4)). The proper name 'Cain' in the combination with the noun 'mark' always will be the only predicate because of its semiotic status. A unique fact, when the proper name Cain is a cognitive center and a symbol, contemporaneously, can be observed. In other words, the proper name Cain is the meaning and expression of the idiom. As the proper name Cain is correlated with the historical person once lived, undoubtedly, the prototypical meaning exists. It should be noted, that not all the events happened with the personality Cain are taken into consideration but that the only one, which was distinguished by people and was fixed in memory as it happened. A sort of choice in unique conditions is observed. Thereby, the idiom 'the mark of Cain' becomes a mythological discourse unit, the discourse with no taxis relations. Exactly, the mythological discourse is that integer where the part, i.e. idiom is extracted from. The proper name as a part of the idiom, attaining the World of Eternity [26], is included harmoniously in the discourse structure which possesses the mythological narration.

Many scientists specify the mythological contexts which denote knowledge about proper names (Losev, 1994, Pyatigorsky, 1996, 2004, Pakhomov, 2012) [27, 28, 29, 30]. There is nothing haphazard, unnecessary or fictional in the world. There is not any myth which is not originated by facts. Any personality is unique. There will not be any exactly the same personality in history. According to Losev A.F. [29], the name is the myth "core" which has universal significance. Any myth is a symbol which has a generalized principle of semantic content further explication.

Thus, any name has a myth. Myths are different. Analyzing English idioms with proper name, the categories: biblical, historical, folksy, bookish and Shakespearean myths have been distinguished. The given classification of idioms with proper name is based on the types of myths which the idioms are originated from [1].

Idioms with proper name referred to the biblical myths category are: Is Saul also among the prophets; as old as Methuselah; David and Jonathan; Jacob's ladder; the kiss by Judas; the old Adam; to be like David and Jonathan; a David and Goliath situation; a Jeremiah; the worship of Mammon; a Job's comforter; to play Judas; a piece of Jesuitry, etc.

Idioms with proper name referred to the historical myths category are: rob Peter to pay Paul, Hobson's choice; peeping Tom, Fortunatus's cap; Fortunatus's purse; Draconian (Draconic) laws; (even) Homer sometimes nods; Peter's pence; since Heck was a pup; a banquet of Lucullus; break Priscian's head; Big Bertha; John Hancock; a Roland for an Oliver; Jack Ketch; Pandora's box; a Procrustean bed; Achilles' heel; Herculean efforts; to cut the Gordian knot; an Adonis; the sword of Damocles / like the sword of Damocles hanging over one; to play Cupid, etc.

Idioms with proper name referred to the folksy myths category are: cousin Betty; Brown, Jones and Robinson; let George do it; astonish the Browns; a plain Jane; not on your Nelly; a proper Charlie; a simple Simon, every Tom, Dick and Harry, etc.

Idioms with proper name referred to the bookish myths category are: Barmecide feast; Aladdin's lamp; Mahomet must go to the mountain; rub Aladdin's lamp; what will Mrs. Grundy say; Queen Anne is dead; doctor Fell; Colonel Blimp; Colonel Chinstrap; Peck's Bad Boy; Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde; like Alice in Wonderland; Robin Hood policies; to be as pleased as Punch; the Cinderella of, etc.

Idioms with proper name referred to the Shakespearean myths category are: Hamlet with Hamlet left out, Cordelia's gift, a Daniel come to judgement, out Herod Herod, to be a Shylock, etc.

The best way for proper name symbolic meaning disclosure is hermeneutical analysis, where a circle is its main heuristic instrument [1]. Due to

proper name tendency to be originated in its mythological function in certain class discourses, the hermeneutical interpretation of proper name functioning starts in discourse. As myth semantics has a cyclic structure [31], it is logical to represent idioms with proper name diagram like a circle. The number of idiom component will be equal to the number of circles, where obligatory, the first circle is the discourse, and the last is the concept, influenced by the proper name distinctive characteristic meaning based on its myth. The illustration of a schematic presentation of the idiom *Cordelia's gift* is shown (see fig. #1).
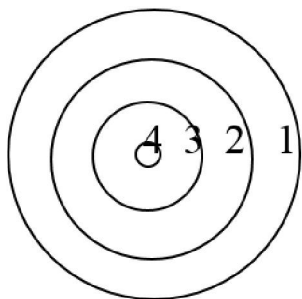

Figure 1. Schematic idiom representation and interpretation.

Cordelia's gift (Shakespeare, King Lear) – a gentle, soft female voice.

Circle #1 – discourse; #2 – Cordelia, the heroine from King Lear by Shakespeare W.; circle #3 – gift as a thing; circle #4 – soft, gentle voice.

The proper name Cordelia is a core member of the idiom formation allusion. The proper name, reviewed in the context of discourse which determines the circle of interpretation and the author's intention, is the cognitive center and the symbol of the idiom. The word 'gift', influenced by the proper name Cordelia is endowed with absolutely new meaning - 'voice'. The individual function [32] of its linguistic identity while 'tracing' through Possible Worlds is a soft, gentle voice but not just a thing which can be got or presented. The ingoing into the concept through a new direction by the proper name Cordelia influence is observed. It is the author's interpretation of the 'linguistic breakthrough' theory by Leo Weisberger [33]. Exactly the proper name Cordelia is the link between the World of Action and the World of Eternity, the world where nothing but symbols act.

Results

1.   One of the results of understanding is the meaning presentation in episodic type of people's memory in the form of basis. There is not a single presentation, included in people's conscience as a result of speech activity, which can be vanished untraceably.

2.   Proper name in idioms has its meaning and defines the internal form of the idiom, i.e. the categorization direction.

3.   Proper name in idioms is its cognitive center.

4.   Proper name in idioms is a symbol.

5.   Proper name is the most reliable means of linguistic personality link in Possible Worlds. Proper name identifies the personality in countless Possible Worlds and connects the worlds, providing their continuity.

6.   Myth is a symbol. It is included in proper name meaning in its symbolic hypostasis. Proper name in idioms narrates not exactly about the proper name intension and extension but about its historical continuity, reflected in mythological interpretation. Idioms with proper name are represented in communicant's linguistic world as units kept in memory, as components of definite mythological discourses.

7.   Myth is the main source of knowledge about the world, about people and their culture, customs and traditions. Myth is the most ancient and powerful descriptive evaluation form of communication. Myth is a repository of historical personality's definite traits, characteristics, acts. Proper name in idioms has a fixed set of features of mythical or real people which are invariable.

8.   Social being implies intentionality. Exactly continual palingenesy causes the intentionality nature of social being. The combination of idiom and the context is encircling of a focus idea i.e. topic, where the topic is intentionality of a definite theme.

Discussion

Cognitive linguistic research analysis, dealing with intentionality [34] opens wide opportunities for theories rethinking on the human factor role in language, generally, and in phraseology, in particular. Traditionally, idiom is considered to be a unique sign which can hardly be interpreted by any logical scheme. Many scientists insist on the fact that idioms can't be structurally and semantically modeled. However, the idiom meaning is not the concept 'gripped' by conventionally determined scheme of interpretation. Undoubtedly, in any particular idiom with proper name usage it is possible to define the meaning, which consolidates participants' communication. But this meaning is only just a point to start further discoveries in proper name infinite content. Proper name in idioms is like a stone thrown into the water which forms many circles on the water surface. Such figurative representation is the gist of idioms perception and the way people conserve it in their memory. While interacting, people understand each other by such 'gists'.

Excessiveness is absolutely necessary condition for idioms understanding. References to the author referred first or to his sociolinguistic source will always be excessive as they reproduce the information, already known from the previous idioms usage. But it is obligatory till the idiom becomes a symbol.

In the act of idiom with proper name usage, the first indicators are the idiom links with the discourse of a definite type, on the one hand, and in immanent meaning structure of the idiom, on the other hand. The proper name predicative meaning type of realization is significant.

Idioms with proper name are symbols. The proper name is unique individual predicate because of its identity. Thereby, the idiom is endowed with symbolic properties on the one hand and with predicative ones, on the other.

Conclusion

1. The understanding phenomenon is multifaceted. Language, being "repository" of knowledge is a small part of the holistic phenomenon which people try to understand.

2. There is no system without initial position. There is no initial position without agent's action. Finally, there is no intervention without agent's realization ability. In idioms with proper names in the biblical, historical, bookish, folksy, Shakespearean myths, the center, where the proposition and illocution are in one, is the proper name itself.

3. Being the cognitive center of idioms, proper name irradiates on the rest idiom components by its symbolic meaning.

4. The world we are living in is the world of myths. Any proper name can be interpreted as a myth. Discourses can represent myths, as well. In this case, discourses are of irrational type, when reality is defined by cyclicality and repeatability.

Hermeneutic vision of proper name functioning in idioms gives the opportunity to understand them and, consequently, to use idioms more extensively.

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8/19/2014