SEMANTIC MOTIVATION OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS WITH NAMES OF ANIMALS
Danyila TSYNTSAR

Acest articol are ca scop prezentarea rezultatelor studiului contrastiv al particularităţilor structurale, semantice şi etimologice ale expresiilor

frazeologice cu nume de animal, denumite zoonime, în baza unui corpus de 200 de exemple, în limbile engleză și română. Relevanța cercetării se explică prin importanța aspectelor culturale în înțelegerea și traducerea expresiilor frazeologice, îmbinări stabile de cuvinte, care au un sens unitar, cunoscute vorbitorilor nativi ai limbii, care dezvoltă un sens metaforic și valori semantice și stilistice necunoscute pentru vorbitorii nenativi.

Phraseology is a relatively young discipline in the field of Linguistics. There are different opinions among linguists on how Phraseology should be defined, classified, described, and analyzed. According to Prof. A.V. Kunin, phraseological units are stable word-groups with partially or fully transferred meanings [1].

A very important aspect in identifying phraseological units is motivation, which plays a great role in discovering the meaning of phraseological units, in explaining different changes in the meaning of a phraseological unit from a free word group to a phraseological one, as well as in finding the grounds of its formation etc. [2]. Motivation has somehow to do with the way in which we interpret a given mental image, coming from a certain phraseological unit, which describes it. This image is accompanied by our knowledge of the world, history, culture. The way a given language is organized determines the way we perceive the world.

However, the main concern of this study is semantic motivation. It is based on the co-existence of direct and figurative meanings of the same word within the same synchronous system. Semantically all word-groups are classified into motivated, partially motivated and non-motivated. There are not very many motivated words in any language. The majority of the words are non-motivated. When some people recognize the motivation, whereas others do not, motivation is said to be faded. The only principle to identify is a word motivating or not motivating is your intuition.

1. Based on a corpus of examples which consists of 200 phraseological units with names of animals, selected from dictionaries of phraseological units such as*: Oxford Dictionary of Current Idiomatic English, Collins English Dictionary, Cambridge Dictionary of Linguistics,* etc. we tried to determine the specificity in meaningful structures of zoonyms and frequency of their use.

2. All idiomatic expressions from our corpus underwent a semantic analysis according to which we divided them into three categories: fully motivated, partially motivated and non-motivated. This is the principle based on V. Vinogradov's classification.

3. The expression is fully motivated if the meaning of the word is determined by the meaning of the components and the structural pattern. In this case the meaning is transparent. For example: *to fight like cats and dogs; which came first: the chicken or the egg?; go to bed with chickens; a barking dog seldom bites; to work like a dog* etc. The majority of people will guess their meaning without consulting a dictionary.

4. The expression *to fight like cats and dogs* is related to people who constantly argue. The dog and cat are enemies since their existence. While it is true that dogs like to annoy cats, it is just as true that cats like to annoy dogs. This kind of behavior is valid for people as well. That is why this idiom is commonly used to describe the relationships between enemies and very often between siblings, who are arguing jealously and violently all the time.

5. The expression *to work like a dog* is used to describe a hardworking person. Since old times dogs have been working as herders, spit-turners and as milk deliverers. Dogs have worked for us as warriors with ammunition strapped to their bodies. Dogs, with their spectacular ability to detect odours, keep us safe by finding drugs and explosives.

6. Here are some examples of partially motivated expressions such as*: early bird; to work like a dog; to kill two birds with one stone; to take the bull by the horns; at a snail's pace; raining cats and dogs; monkey see, monkey do.* We analyzed some of them. It has been widely noted that the individual words in an idiom cannot be replaced by synonyms and still retain the idiomatic reading of the phrase. This is what qualifies them as fixed forms. If in an expression one world will be replaced by another, the meaning will not remain the same. That is why these expressions have to be learnt and remembered by speaker.

7. Here are some examples: *to kill two birds with one stone,* which means to achieve two things by taking a single action. There are conflicting opinions as to the origin of this particular idiom, but there are a few possibilities as to where the idea of killing two birds with

one stone first originated. Over time, *to kill two birds with one stone* has come to be used more generally to accomplishing two goals at once, and the negative connotations have largely vanished.

There are also non-idiomatic expressions, whose meanings represent the sum of their constituent meanings. This is the most numerous category. Some examples are: *John Bull; grease monkey; a bar fly; bear market; cold turkey; when pigs fly; monkey business; to keep the wolf from the door; squirrel away; as hungry as a wolf; a sacred cow; go ape*.

Thus, the common phrase *bat out of hell* has nothing to do with either bat or hell, but means simply, "very quickly". Actually bats have been associated with witches and the occult as they fly and fly quickly as if in panic – to make the comparison with a bat flying out of hell for anything going recklessly fast would seem quite natural and likely to be a country idiom prior to being recorded in print.

The example, *squirrel away* gets its name from the squirrel and its famous habit of storing nuts and other food for the winter. To understand this idiom it is necessary to know what the main activity of this animal.

The next phraseological unit, *to keep the wolf from the door* means to ward off starvation or financial ruin; to maintain oneself at a minimal level.

Thus, in order to process and understand these idioms, other pieces of knowledge must be activated: the knowledge of the symbolization behind the constituents of these animal names. Idiom has the meaning only as a unit and has lexical and grammatical stability as well. If to look at the individual words, it may not even make sense grammatically. All these examples are motivated by knowledge that there is a story behind them, even if this story may not be mentally present with all its details to every speaker.

8. While analyzing the corpus of examples we made a statistics based on the nature of the most common idiomatic expressions. As a result 4.5% are fully motivated, 35.5% are partially motivated and 60% are non-motivated.

9. The semantic criterion is of great help in stating the semantic difference/similarity between phraseological units and words. The

meaning in phraseological units is created by mutual interaction of elements and conveys a single concept. The actual meaning of phraseological units is figurative and is opposed to the literal meaning of the word-combinations from which they are derived. The semantic unity, however, makes phraseological units similar to words.

10.Thus, it can be concluded that in order to understand a phraselogical unit with names of animals it is necessary to know the main characteristics of the certain animals and things that we associate with them. As a result of our analysis it was shown that the most phraseological units are non-motivated. There is a history behind them that is why the own way to understand them is learning by heart.

References:
1. TOLESHOVA, M. *Phraseology as a Subsystem of Language*. Kazakhstan: SKSU named after M.Auezov, 2013.
2. BESHAJ, Lubjana. *Motivation and Etymology of Phraseological Units in English and Albanian Language,* Italy: MCSER Publishing, 2014, p.193.

Recomandat
Rodica CARAGIA, lector univ.