

ETYMOLOGY OF ENGLISH IDIOMS

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The article deals with the etymology of English idioms. It reveals the notion of this phenomenon and its reflection in the English language. It researches the fields of this concept, defines the meaning of an idiom and the meaning of the term “etymology” and the origin of English idioms. Idioms are social and cultural phenomena that reflect social psychological characteristic of behavior, they relate to the communicative human behavior which implies norms, rules and traditions of communication of this or that lingua-cultural community. One of the most important aspects in the study of the English language is the study of English idioms. In any language there are expressions in which the individual words that make up this expression lose their original meaning. Everyone strives to express ideas and thoughts expressively and it is impossible without idioms which are present in every language of the world. They strengthen the speech and improve understanding cultural norms of the community. This article is undoubtedly relevant as it contains idioms of the modern English language which reveal the beauty of the language. And a great significance is given to the etymology of the idioms’ origin, as it is easier to learn and understand the idiom when you know the origin of it.

Key words: idiom, etymology, origin, expression, meaning, community, activity.

Introduction. One of the most important aspects in the study of the English language is the study of English idioms. In any language there are expressions in which the individual words that make up this expression lose their original meaning. The general meaning of this expression is not made up of individual meanings of

words. Etymology comes from ancient Greece. The original meaning of the word “*etymos*” is real, authentic. The second constituent of this term is “*logia*” which means “*science, study*”. Thus, etymology is the science which is closely connected to the origin of words. Why do we need etymology? Not only for general development and being well-learned, but knowing the derivation of idioms can help us remember words and phrases, form certain associations with them. It greatly increases the knowledge of the language and broadens thesaurus. An illustration is such a common word as “*hippopotamus*” which is known for everybody, but no means all know why it defines a wonderful animal. This word includes two parts “*hippos*” (a horse) and “*potamus*” (a river), i.e. “*hippopotamus*” could be defined as “*river horse*” by this notion. Many Ukrainian words originate from Latin and Greek words. The examples are “*micro*” (*small*), “*phone*” (*speak*), “*scope*” (*see*), “*tele*” (*distance*). Such roots are the components of the compound nouns: “*microphone, microscope, telephone, telescope*”. The point is that teaching students about the etymology of idioms can help to remember them easier and to use idioms correctly in speech.

Aim and tasks. The aim of this article is to reveal the meaning of some English idioms, their etymology, to study and analyse the origin of the English idioms, to classify the origin of idioms into groups reflecting different themes. As this knowledge can make a great contribution to understanding the language better and express the ideas noticeably and dramatically. Using idioms can help you to establish contact with the people you are talking to and to avoid the reputation of a “very serious” person. The more you use idioms in your speech in the right context the better people think of you. It can witness your good knowledge of the language and the culture. Studying phrasal verbs enriches the speech, widens thesaurus, promotes effective communication and generalizes knowledge about the country and its culture.

Theoretical background. The science which deals with idioms is called phraseology. The main principles of phraseology as a linguistic discipline were worked out by N. Chomsky [4], B. Fraser [6], V.V. Vinogradov [1], A.V. Kunin [2]

and other linguists. Modern foreign philology is concentrated on the corpus-based studies of idioms [5], their syntactic peculiarities and cultural context [8].

S.Alavi defines idioms as “multi word expressions which meanings cannot be deduced from the meaning of their parts in a entirely compositional method” [5, p. 170].

According to B. Frazer, idioms organize one important part of the language and culture. Knowing a language means knowing idioms of the language. Unlike from commonplace phrases, idioms tend to be frozen in form and denotation and don't allow change in structure and meaning [6, p. 22].

Interpretation of idiomatic expressions by A.V. Kunin defines idioms as rethinking of semantic transformation of literal meaning of the speech and language prototype of a phraseological unit creating phraseological abstraction. Rethinking, being one of the ways of reflection of reality in the human mind is associated with the playback features reflected by objects on the foundation of communication between them [2, p. 98].

Thus, there are many different approaches to the defining idioms. In the context we understand every word, but we cannot understand the whole meaning. These difficulties are connected with idiomatic expressions. According to A.A. Reformatsky, phrasal or idiomatic expressions are the words and word-combinations which are specific for the speech of different population groups by class or professional indication. The term phraseology comes from French “*phraseologie*” or Greek “*phrasis*” – “*expression*” and *logos* – “*study*”. Many scientists define this branch of lexic as idioms [3, p.70].

According to C. Ren an idiom is a fixed group of words the meaning of which is not clear from the denotation of each single word and can be understood at large, idioms are made of a set of words or phrases. Idioms are a kind of cultural phenomenon. So, they are not the results of the individuals, but they are the results of collective intellectual in the civilization, which are influenced by politics, trade, crafts, religion, and art, and so on. English idioms are affected by English culture, which focus on social activities [9].

In phraseological unity the connotation of the whole is never equal to the sum of the denotations of the elements. This is a qualitatively new meaning, which appeared as a result of a peculiar “chemical” combination of words. Phraseological unity is recognized by both external and on internal grounds. External formal features are conventional, deceptive, unstable and do not play a crucial role. They relate to unchangeable word order and the inability to be substituted by a synonym or some other word that compose the unity of the idiomatic unity [1, p.140].

Preliminary sampling. The analysis of the texts of different genres can give us the material to outline the characteristic features of the idioms.

Take a look at this text, you have read the following text:

“Sam is a real cool cat. He never blows his stack and hardly ever flies off the handle. What's more, he knows how to get away with things. Well, of course, he is getting on, too”. Obviously, the style cannot be called a literature style, but native speakers in conversation with each other often use such idioms.

In close accordance with the American idioms dictionary idiomatic expressions used in the foregoing example have the following meaning: “*to be a (real) cool cat*” defines as “*to be a really calm person*”; “*to blow one’s stack*” signifies “*to lose control*”; “*to fly off the handle*” means “*to become excessively angry*”; “*to get away with something*” is an equivalent to “*to perpetrate an illegitimate or tricky act without any harm*”; “*to be getting on*” is interpreted as “*to get older*”; “*pepper and salt*” means “*black or dark hair mixed with silver or grey*”; “*to make up for something*” is equal to “*to recompense for something*”; “*to take it easy*” has several meanings – “*to relax, to have a rest, not to worry*”; “*to work out*” is “*to exercise, to do gymnastics*”; the interpretation of the idiomatic expression “*to turn in*” means “*to go to bed at night*”; “*like a breeze*” defines as “*without any effort, easily*”; “*to have got it made*” is interpreted as “*to be successful*” [6].

From this example we can see that idioms take a significant place in studying of the language. Idioms are often used by Americans and Englishmen as they are usual for them, but for the people studying the language it can be as a foreign language that is difficult to understand.

The form of alike idiomatic expression is stable; many of them cannot function in another form. Studying the sources of these idioms and their usage in the sentences or situations can help greatly to express the ideas and thoughts accurately and be sure in their correct usage. The meaning of idioms does not coincide with the meaning of the words comprising them. Word for word translation of idioms into other languages does not reflect its accurate sense or it gives absolutely different meaning.

Many words in idioms obtain metaphorical meaning; many of them got figurative meaning and they are used in description of actions or circumstances more or less similar topics which caused them to the usage. It often happens that previous metaphorical meaning of such idioms is clear. For instance, “*to keep one’s head above water*”; “*to be left stranded*” (to be in difficult situation); “*much water has flown under the bridge(s) (since)*” (a lot of time has passed since then and many things have changed); “*still waters run deep*”, etc.

Classification of idioms. People use many idioms without knowing their previous meaning. In preliminary consultation with lexicographic sources [7] , [8] and quantitative analysis of the results we came to the conclusion that frequently used idioms in English can be classified into the main groups, ones which are connected with nature and natural phenomena, others with human activity, jobs.

Natural phenomena. There are some moon-related idioms in English, including “*to be over the moon*” that means to be delighted; “*to ask for the moon*” that denotes to make excessive and impossible demands; “*once in a blue moon*”, the phrase refers to something that takes place very seldom. For example: “*We only can see him once in a blue moon*”. Confusingly, “*a blue moon*” doesn’t refer to the actual colour of the moon; it means that when the full moon can be seen two times in a month. This takes place every two or three years. It’s believed that the word “*blue*” may come from the word “*belewe*”, that is interpreted as “to betray”; the “betray moon” was an supplementary spring full moon that would mean people could have to fast for an additional month during the Lent. The proverb in its present denotation was first documented in 1821. Other idioms are connected with human life and working experience, parts of body. For instance, the English idiom “*to turn a blind*

eye” means to pretend not to have detected something. For instance: “*She has taken one of the cakes, but I turned a blind eye*”. Remarkably, this idiom is said to have appeared as a result of the prominent English marine hero Admiral Horatio Nelson, who, during the Battle of Copenhagen in 1801, is said to have purposely upraised his telescope to his blind eye, hence confirming that he would not see any indication from his superior giving him discernment to remove from the combat [10].

The English idiom “*to blow one’s own trumpet*” that denotes to brag about your own accomplishments is widely used by Americans. For example: “*Without meaning to blow my own trumpet, I became the of the class.*” Though, the expressions with the similar item had been in use for centuries, the concrete expression is first documented by Anthony Trollope in his 1873 work *Australia and New Zealand*. The idiom “*to play it by ear*” is also used by native speakers; it has the following meaning as: let’s see how all this will go. It means that things go by their plan rather than sticking to a well-defined plan, you will see how deals go and choose the course of action as you do. For instance: “*What time shall we go shopping?*”, “*Let’s see how the weather looks and play it by ear.*” This saying has its roots in music, as “*playing something by ear*”, it can be interpreted as to play music without reference to the notes on a page. This meaning of the phrase dates back to the 16th century, but the present use only came into being in mid-20th century America, chiefly referring to sports. These days, the expression can be used in any context [7].

Naval English idioms were borrowed from the speech of sailors as English has been a naval state, such as: “*to touch bottom*” denotes to be at the lowest or worst point; “*to hold at bay*” means – to keep somebody at the distance, not to let come closer; “*there are other (good) fish in the sea*” means there are many other brilliant or more appropriate people, things, chances, or possibilities in the world that one may find; “*to weather the storm*” denotes to cope with a difficult job; “*to rock the boat*” has the meaning to make troubles; “*to know how the ropes tie*”, e.g. if someone who “*knows the ropes ties*” it means that he is experienced at what he is doing. “*Showing someone the ropes*” means to explain to them how something must be done. For instance: “*Ask Mike, he knows how the ropes tie*”. This idiom has its origins in the

golden age of sailing, when understanding how to tackle the ropes to run a ship and it was an indispensable marine skillfulness. By the middle of 19-th century it was a common slang expression, and it continues to exist nowadays [7].

If we take a well-known English idioms “*raining cats and dogs*”. It denotes a hard rain. For this kind of weather, we can say it was ‘*bucketing it down*’ when it’s raining heavily. For example: “*Listen to that rain!*” “*It’s raining cats and dogs!*” “*Look at how it pours! I am not going out in that storm. It’s raining cats and dogs*”. The source of this weird phrase is vague, though it was first documented in 1651 in the poem of Henry Vaughan’s collection “Olor Iscanus”. Speculations about its origins dates from old-fashioned superstition of Norse mythology, but it can refer to the dead animals being swept away through the roads by floods [6].

Conclusions. We strive to have our speech understandable and clear and at the same time we willingly use words in unusual meaning, knowing that novelty and uncommonness affect our imagination and add liveliness and charm to our speech. Many idioms appeared in professional speech, as all types of human activity have its lexis, its specific terms which sometimes penetrate in metaphoric usage in literary language. Our speech transfers all richness of life and its interrelations, all thoughts and feelings. Literary language is ready to borrow special terms which are present in day-to-day existence. Idioms and sayings created by people from different spheres of activity, being precise, colloquial, vivid reflecting life can always find application in expressive speech. Sailors, cooks, hunters who needed to express a threat, order or warning were able to find bright word-combination, colorful metaphors connected with circumstances of their activity. These phrases impressed listeners’ imagination entered their professional vocabulary. Afterwards some of these phrases got wider sense and were used in similar situation in another sphere, often with humor. And gradually the brightest and expressive phrases penetrated into literary language having become a universal heritage.

An indispensable condition for the successful mastering of the English language is the knowledge of idioms and idiomatic expressions, as well as the sources of their origin. In order to use this or that idiom, it is necessary to know its

true origin. The assigned objectives and tasks were achieved. The sources of English idioms' origin were studied and analyzed. Having studied the origin of many English idioms it is obvious that all of them reflect different direction and topics: observation of nature, parts of body, people's activity, especially sailors' activity, trade, weather conditions. With the help of idioms information aspect of the language is added by sensitive-intuitive description of the world. For instance, if we take these proverbs: *"Rome was not built in a day"*; *"all roads lead to Rome"*. Being the biggest city, the center of the world, Rome played a significant role in life of people, and it was reflected in the language. Another source of idioms is parts of human body, which gave the largest number of idioms, e.g. *"to keep one's head"*, and also *"to have a head on one's shoulders"* means to be reasonable in different situations.

The English language has a long history. For centuries, it has accumulated a large number of idiomatic expressions that were once uttered by someone and they were liked by people and were fixed in the language, being successful, well-aimed and beautiful. And later the special layer of the language appeared, phraseology, the collection of fixed expressions with their special meaning. The range of areas of all idioms is diverse and wide. Frequently used idioms composed with the sea and natural themes are in the prospect of investigation in fiction.

Undoubtedly knowing the origin of the idioms can significantly help to learn the idioms faster. Thus, the perspective of our further investigation is the analysis of the previously distinguished groups of idioms in British and American fiction.

Бобровник С.М.

Етимологія англійських ідіом

У статті розглядається етимологія англійських ідіом, розкривається походження ідіом і їх відображення в англійській мові, дається визначення ідіом і значення терміна «етимологія», приводяться приклади походження деяких англійських ідіом з прикладами вживання та історією походження. Одним з найбільш важливих аспектів у вивченні іноземної мови є вивчення ідіом, так як в будь-якій мові є вирази, де окремі слова, які складають цей вираз, зрозумілі, а переклад виразу в цілому неясний. Кожен прагне виразити свої ідеї та думки експресивно і це неможливо без вивчення ідіом, які присутні на будь-якій

мові світу. Ідіоми надають забарвлення мовленню, покращують розуміння культурних норм суспільства. Безсумнівно, стаття є релевантною, так як, вона містить ідіоми сучасної англійської мови, проливає світло на походження цих ідіом, це надає можливість краще їх зрозуміти і засвоїти. Англійська мова має довгу історію. Протягом багатьох століть вона накопичувала велику кількість ідіоматичних виразів, які були колись сказані кимось і вони сподобалися людям за свою своєрідність та чіткість формулювання та закріпилися в мові, стали успішними, влучними і красивими. А пізніше з'явився спеціальний шар мови, фразеологія, як сукупність стійких виразів з їх особливим змістом. Діапазон площ всіх ідіом різноманітний і широкий. Отже, вивчення ідіом є необхідна умова вивчення іноземної мови, а знання походження таких виразів допоможе засвоїти їх краще і правильно вживати в мовленні.

Ключові слова: ідіома, етимологія, походження, значення, спільнота, діяльність.

Бобровник С.Н.

Этимология английских идиом

В статье рассматривается этимология английских идиом, раскрывается происхождение идиом и их отражение в английском языке, дается определение идиом и значение термина «этимология», приводятся примеры происхождения некоторых английских идиом с примерами употребления и историей происхождения. Одним из наиболее важных аспектов в изучении иностранного языка является изучение идиом, так как в любом языке есть выражения, в котором, отдельные слова, которые составляют это выражение, понятны, а перевод выражения в целом неясен. Идиомы придают речи окраску, улучшают понимание культурных норм общества. Отсюда следует, что изучение идиом есть необходимое условие изучения иностранного языка, а знание происхождения таких выражений поможет усвоить их лучше и правильно употреблять в речи.

Ключевые слова: идиома, этимология, происхождение, значение, сообщество, деятельность.

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