

ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS AND THEIR CONSTANT FUNCTIONS

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Summary. One of the most debatable points in modern linguistics, and especially in phraseology, is the problem of function of the linguistic sign. Some functions are considered to be constant and some other functions are considered to be variable or occasional. The paper deals with the constant functions of phraseological units in Modern English and with their most characteristic features. The scientific basis of the research is the phraseological theory and the definition of the phraseological unit suggested by Alexander V. Kunin and the method of phraseological identification introduced by the linguist into the research of English phraseology, which has appeared to be a relevant method for phraseological studies in other Germanic languages, such as German, Swedish and Norwegian. Communicative, cognitive and nominative functions and their sub-types are treated in the paper presented as constant functions of phraseological units.

Key words: phraseological units, communicative, cognitive, nominative functions.

Introduction.

The problem of functions is one of the most urgent issues in phraseology. Phraseological units (PUs) have a definite 'programme' of functioning which is predetermined by their essence itself, as Alexander V. Kunin puts it [Kunin 1996: 111]. Some PU functions are constant, i.e. inherent in all phraseological units in any case of their realization, other PU functions are variable, characteristic only of some classes of phraseological units. We maintain, after A.V. Kunin, that communicative, cognitive and nominative functions are constant functions of phraseological units.

The communicative function of phraseological units consists in their ability to serve as a communicative or message means. Communication presupposes a mutual exchange of statements, and message presupposes the transfer of information without a feedback with the reader or the listener. The communicative PU function is usually connected with the cultural identity of the utterance [Gläser 2009:87].

The nominative function of phraseological units is their relation to objects of the real world, including situations, and also replacement of these objects in speech activity by their phraseological denominations. The filling of lacunas in the lexical system of the language is characteristic of the nominative function of phraseological units. This function is peculiar to the overwhelming majority of phraseological units, as they do not usually have lexical synonyms. The nominative function embraces neutrally-nominal and nominal function [Kunin 1996: 112]. **The neutrally-nominal function** is the basic one for phraseological units, e.g. *brown paper*. In realization of such phrases in communication the fact of a designation of the object is important, and not the stylistic use of the phrase. **The nominal function** is also characteristic of semantically transferred phraseological units, such as idiomaticisms and idiophrasematisms, but it is not neutral, it is stylistically marked, e.g.: *new broom, desperate remedies, tales out of school, crocodile tears, Pandora's box*, etc.

The function which is closely connected with the nominative one is **the cognitive function**, i.e. the socially-determined reflection of objects of the real world mediated by consciousness, promoting their cognition. The social determinacy is shown in the fact that, though potential phraseological units are created by separate individuals, these individuals are part of the society, and the realization of the cognitive function by them is possible only on the basis of previous/background knowledge. Cognitive and nominative functions are realized within the limits of the communicative function, forming a dialectic unity, and all the other functions are realized within the limits of the given functions. The hierarchy of the functional aspect of the phraseological system is seen in it.

Among **the semantic functions** voluntative (from Latin *voluntas* – will), deictic, resultative, etc. functions are found out.

The voluntative function is the function of will expression, e.g.: *wish smb well* with the meaning of 'to wish good luck, success to smb, to treat smb benevolently': *I wish Jane Fairfax very well; but she tires me to death* (J. Austen).

The deictic function consists in an indication of spatial or time localization of the action, phenomenon, event which is relative to the reference point, relevant within the limits of one or another speech situation. Besides, personal deixis exists: a person, a place or time can be the reference point. According to this fact three types of deixis are singled out: personal, spatial and time ones, e.g.: *Time and tide wait for no man; It is too late to lock the stable door when the horse is stolen; Don't swap horses when crossing a stream; Strike while the iron is hot.*

The resultative function consists in a designation of the reason which has caused an action or a condition expressed by a phraseological unit, e.g.: *come a cropper* with the meaning of 'to fail, to get to a trouble': *Gerald: I may as well tell you at once that I've had very bad luck. I wanted to make money and I've come an absolute cropper* (W.S. Maugham).

The major function of any unit of language including the phraseological unit is **the pragmatic function**, i.e. purposeful influence of a language sign on the addressee. The pragmatic orientation is peculiar to any text which influences phraseological units used in the text, and that is promoted by their considerable pragmatic potential. Phraseological units strengthen the pragmatic orientation of the text or of its part – a context. From this point of view the sub-types of the pragmatic function are stylistic, cumulative, directive, evaluative and summarizing functions.

The stylistic function is a special, in comparison with the neutral way of expression, purposefulness of language means to achieve a stylistic effect with preservation of the general intellectual content of the statement. The stylistic function realizes connotative features of a phraseological unit in speech [Fedulenkova 2001: 15]. In the language there is only stylistic colouring. The idea about it is given by marks and comments in stylistic dictionaries which,

unfortunately, are still far from being perfect. Comparison of a phraseological unit with its variable prototypical combination of words also helps to reveal stylistic colouring.

Developing, on the Russian material, the phraseological theory in its functional-semantic aspect, S.G. Gavrin singles out some functions of phraseological units [Gavrin 1974: 99]. These functions are also characteristic of English phraseological units: a) the expressively-figurative function (*pull one's leg; put the cart before the horse*); b) the emotionally-expressive function (*damn your eyes!; My foot!*); c) the function of speech concision by omitting some components (*Don't teach your grandmother!* instead of *Don't teach your grandmother to suck eggs!*).

Proverbs, especially short ones, even not of the reduced kind [Fedulenkova 2003: 11], carry out **the function of speech laconization**, e.g.: *Give a dog a bad name and hang him* meaning 'once someone has acquired a bad reputation, it is almost impossible for him to shake it off, and even his most innocent actions will be misunderstood' (DOEI). It is evident, that the definition is almost four times as long as the proverb itself. The semantic compression, characteristic of phraseological units, is one of the instances of language economy [Fedulenkova 2002: 24]. All those functions, and also **the function of hyperbolization and intensity** are sub-types of the stylistic function: *make a mountain out of a mole hill*. Especially active in the function of hyperbolization are the phraseological units with a somatic component in their structure: *din into smb's ears, from ear to ear, under one's nose, up to the ears, over ears, over head and ears, up to the eyes, cry one's eyes out, set one's eyes at flow, pipe one's/ the eye, be all eyes, be all ears, with all the eyes in one's head, strain one's ears, have one's hands full, not to stir a finger, not to lift a hand*, e.g.: *I will not lift a finger to save this reptile* (B. Shaw).

The cumulative function is highly peculiar to proverbs (which are regarded as communicative phraseological units [Fedulenkova 2000: 172]) as they are generalizing the life experience of the people. With the cumulative function 'one more function is closely connected – directly managing, directing, influencing, and, in a certain way, bringing up, forming a person. We named it directive' [Vereshchagin, Kostomarov 1983: 98]. To exemplify **the directive function** the following proverbs can be given: *Never say die; Look before you leap; Don't cry out before you are hurt; Let every tailor stick to his goose*; etc.

The summarizing function of a phraseological unit consists in the fact that it may serve as a short resume of the previous statement, e.g.: *that's flat* (coll.) meaning 'it is definitively solved, resolutely and irrevocably': *Well, I will not marry her: that's flat* (G.B. Shaw). The summarizing function in a context is characteristic of many proverbs, e.g.: *Ill gotten, ill spent; In for a penny, in for a pound; After supper, mustard; As the call, so the echo; All's well that ends well*; [Fedulenkova 1999: 41].

The pragmatic character is also revealed in **the evaluative function**. A kind of the pragmatic function is **the contact-establishing function** consisting in creation of an easy dialogue between the author and the reader or the listener, and also among the characters themselves, e.g.: *Introducing a luxury car that will not take you for a ride* (The New Yorker). The given advertising heading concerns a car, and two meanings of the phraseological unit 'take smb for a ride' are played up – 1) to kill, finish off smb; 2) to inflate, deceive smb.

English proverbs are often employed in **the function of confirmation** of a thought. It is also one of the sub-types of the pragmatic function, e.g.: *It is an ill bird that fouls its own nest* – meaning 'only the bad bird defiles the nest': *Augustus: ...Do you mean to say, you scoundrel, that an Englishman is capable of selling his country to the enemy for gold? – The Clerk: Not as a general thing I would not say it, but there's men here who would sell their own mothers for two coppers if they got the chance. – Augustus:... It's an ill bird that fouls its own nest* (G.B. Shaw).

Interjectional phraseological units can carry out **the compensatory function** which is realized in the description of strong sincere emotional experience, affect, when one's speech is complicated and an interjectional phraseological unit is the only content of the whole remark [Polishchuk 1988: 20], e.g.: *oh dear* meaning 'my God': *Jimmy: They did not say much. But I think she's dying. – Cliff: Oh, dear* (J. Osborne).

The text-building function / context-building function is characteristic of phraseological units in their context realizations. For the first time the question concerning text-building functions of phraseological units was raised by Irina I. Chernysheva [Chernysheva 1974: 161]. The proposition that phraseological units can serve a binding means of not only contexts, but also of context fragments seems relevant. This function has a diverse embodiment, therefore we will give a number of examples:

e.g. 1: *Nina: You cannot do that to Sam. – Darrell (savagely): Like hell I cannot* (E. O'Neill). A phraseological unit 'like hell' connects both remarks.

e.g. 2: *Gerald (With his tongue in his cheek): Then good-bye* (W.S. Maugham). The author emphasizes the irony of Gerald who pretended that he said goodbye indifferently. The author's remark and the words of Gerald form 'a phraseological configuration' (A.V. Kunin's term).

e.g. 3: *'Not was but a poor man himself,' said Peggotty, 'but as good as gold and as true as steel'* (Ch. Dickens). Here the repetition of identically structural comparisons creates parallel constructions within the limits of a phrase context.

The more the phraseological meaning is abstracted from the grammatical meaning of the phraseological unit [Fedulenkova 2009: 47], the more independent of grammar the PU function is.

Conclusions.

Evidently, in texts of various types phraseological units carry out various functions – descriptive, characterizing, terminological and some others. Thus, all the functions described above are constant, i.e. presenting the norm of the language (for occasional or variable functions see: [Naciscione 2005: 289; Fedulenkova 2003: 86]).

Summing it up, about twenty constant functions of English phraseological units have been described.

The nearest perspective in the studies of PU functions is seen in the research of the idiophraseostyle of a chosen author.

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Abbreviations

PUs – phraseological units

DOEI - Gulland D.M., Hinds-Howell D.G. The Penguin Dictionary of English Idioms. – Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1994.