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ETHNOCULTURAL IDIOM SPECIFICITY: FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS OR LATENT PROBLEMS?

Abstract

Ethnocultural idiom specificity is dwelt upon from the methodological views of cognitive phraseology. The two aspects are under study, i.e. linguocultural idiom specificity and cognitive factors defining their ethnocultural specific nature. In terms of verbalisation of culture specific reflection of reality, the structure of phraseme forming concept implies the main mechanisms, namely: a) sensory perceptual processes, b) linguocreative thinking, and c) ordinary conceptual perception of the world.

Keywords: idiom, ethnoculture, phraseological universals, unique idioms, phraseme forming concept, linguocreative thinking.

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Introduction

At the stage of becoming phraseology a linguistic discipline, many researchers laid a special emphasis on studying the expressive figurative nature of phrasesems (in European terminology – idiology), and its ethnolinguistic specificity. Perhaps the most profound observations were expressed by Leonid I. Roizenzon who called phraseemics the most original and complicated phenomenon “out of the all creations of human linguistic genius” (L. Roizenzon, 1977: 116). Over the time, this state of things seemed to become stable. At the turn of the 20th-21st centuries, however, against the background of the cognitive contrastive analysis of the phrasesems correlated in different languages, it began being doubted in the works of even such authoritative in phraseology scholars as Harry Walter and Valeriy M. Mokienko. According to them, nowadays there is an overestimation of phraseemics culture specific that originates from “the folkloric and linguistic romanticism of the first half of the 19th century” (H. Walter, V. Mokienko, 2013: 1). Their own studies constituted a ground for disproving the folkloric romanticism postulates. As viewed by these scholars, most phrasesems “by no means emerged on the folk and national ground proper, but on the all-European cultural and philosophical ones” (ibid: 2). The main reason for this is that in the languages compared there are phrasesems of the same vocabulary like Russ. lovit’ rybku v munoy voide – Eng. to fish in troubled waters, ad lit. “lovit’ rybku v munoy voide”; Russ. iskat’ igolku v stoge sena – Eng. to look for a needle in a haystack, lit. “iskat’ igolku v stoge sena”. No doubt, for peoples of small Europe linguocultural communication are of such importance that they could not have led to numerous borrowings and calques both in vocabulary and idiomology (T. Cherdanceva, 1996: 58; A. Cowie, 1998).The main reason for borrowing of “other’s” idiom is the lack of the corresponding concept (a naïve, trivial notion) in the cognitive base of the recipient language. Among other reasons one should name the necessity to express the polysemity of the known concept with the help of a loan idiom, to replenish the expressive means of the mother tongue, etc. (T. Fedulenkova, 2014). Special intensity of the phrasesem interpenetration process was given by the Scriptures, i.e. idiomology of biblical origin penetrated into the linguistic consciousness of European people (D. Balakova et al., 2014). That is why the views of those researchers who do not exclude that “Somebody else’s” can turn into a part of “One’s own” are significant (S. Georgieva, 2013: 36; M. Lapteva, 2012; Zh. Fink, 2013: 151).

Finding out the ethnocultural specificity of phrasesems is certainly impossible without comparing folk wisdom fixed in the tropes in different languages. However, it is very unlikely to solve the given task confining oneself just to the structurally semantic comparison of idioms, of closely related languages in particular (cf.: J. Korhonen, 2007). It was Aleksandr A. Reformatskiy who wrote the following: “Closely related languages are of great interest for the contrastive method as the temptation of identifying “one’s own” with “somebody else’s” ... “lies on the surface”. But it is exactly that kind of provocative proximity, the overcoming of which is fraught with big practical difficulties. It is especially applied to such groups of languages as Slavic and Turkic” (A. Revormatskiy, 1987: 41; italicized by – N.A.). At the same time it is necessary to take into account that within the interpenetration of linguocultures foreign language units are subjected to paradigmatic and syntagmatic adaptation. “The adoption of something belonging to somebody else’s”, Aleksandr A. Revormatskiy continued his reasoning, “lies exactly in its subjecting to something of one’s own” (A. Revormatskiy, 1987: 42). Adapting loan phrasesems and their components in terms of adaptation to the nominative semantic system of the borrowing language is necessary for their effective functioning, indeed. For instance, “morphological adoption of foreign phraseologism [...] begins with endowing it with active grammatical categories (G. Kadantsjva, 2008: 137). Thus, nouns in the composition of the English phrase borrowed by the German language, acquire the categories of number and gender, e.g. der Zapper, die Bubble Economy, verbs, in their turn, borrow a definite conjugation type (the weak one, as a rule – machen, makte gemacht), e.g. bad blood maken. Adjectives are adopted on the analogy of German, e.g. eaiseres Leben.

Nowadays such a delicate issue should be considered in the light of modern cognitive culture linguistics achievements, moreover, before our eyes contrastive cognitive linguistics is onward and upward (see N. Alefirenko, Sh. Zharkynbekova, 2014).

Linguocultural idiom specificit

Even in case of entire foreign phrasesem adaptation the original connection with their traditional event discursive origins is retained. It is no coincidence that academician Fedor I. Busljaev called “well-known common expressions” “peculiar micromyths”, the semantics of which implies “both moral law and common sense expressed in short sayings that were bequeathed by ancestors to guide their descendants” (F. Busljaev, 1954: 37). Therefore appealing to phrasesems lets us approach to the realising the peculiarities of nation mental make-up not in an abstract way but in the context of that axiological space in which these phrasesems were formed. We act on the premise that the prime purpose of phrasesems is that of their reflexive function. The phrasesem content is always aimed at the wisdom of the ages and nation value system fixed in them. Specific
cultural worldview and peculiarities of national mentality are implemented in their discursive modus semantics. As a result, ethnonomological phrase specificity of any language shows up in a multifaceted way, namely,

a) in reflection of nation mental make-up and the peculiarities of national consciousness;

b) featuring in peculiarities of national form and any nation ethno-cultural colouring that is reflected in phraesological image, being specific for different peoples;

c) in the specific origins of phrase forming concept (L. Bayramova 2013: 170);

d) in psychosemantic shades of phraseological connotation (A. Naciscione, 2010) caused by the genesis and peculiarities of meaning system functioning in either language, with this system making up the process of ethno-cultural perception, thinking and linguistic memory;

e) in ethnonomological distinction of encoding of one and the same content.

To make sure of this, it is quite enough to turn to spoken language that is extremely larded with specific set expressions, indeed. It seems that in any language there are lexical nominals that are used in them, e.g. names for geese, ducks and hens. However, their unusual combination with metaphoric epithets within the Russian linguistic consciousness, for instance, cause such associative-metaphorical meanings that are either absent in any other linguoculture, or applied in a different discursive pragmatic level. By the way, the uniqueness of most Russian phrases is exactly determined by their associative-notional relations within a certain discursive pragmatic paradigm. Thus, on sudden discovering somebody’s negative traits of character, a Russian would most likely say: ‘gus’ lapchatyi, khorosh gus’, nu i gus!’

‘Gus’ lapchatyi is a humorous / ironic name for a rascal or just a dodger who is easy to get out of difficult situations, to avoid somebody’s negative traits of character, a Russian would most likely say: ‘gus’ lapchatyi, khorosh gus’, nu i gus!’

This phraseme can be used when talking about somebody who easily gets away from his obligations or is an abuser of human power of observation. It dates back from a healer’s discourse that represents a widespread verbal and cognitive event reflecting an ancient heathen popular belief that was rooted itself in ingenious Russian folk’s consciousness. That is why this is not a common proverb, as it seems to be, but a part of an old incantation, magic spell. Even both healers while throwing “incanted water” on ill children, and caring parents when bathing their precious child used to keep incanting. By doing this they wished their children to get rid of leanness (some ailment). ‘S gusya voda, a s tebya, dityatko, vsya khudoba’. Sometimes this spell in the mouth of dear people turned into a form of direct address: ‘Kak s gusya voda, s nashego Koleni’ki (ili Katvenki) – khudoba’. Quite an ordinary fact served as the basis for the appearance of another phrase: vykhodit’ sukhim iz vody – to avoid just deserts; remain untouched, unpunished; to wriggle out of a complicated, an unpleasant situation without any loss or damage. This phrase can surely be translated into different languages. While being translated, however, its culture-specific uniqueness is lost even when their lexical components coincide: to come out dry – lit. vyiti sukhim iz vody. All the more reason this loss is noticeable when using the other phraseological equivalents: Eng. come through unscathed – lit. vykhodit’ nevredimym; to come off clear – lit. vyiti sukhim iz vody; thy back shall go unscathed – lit. roya spina vyidet nepovrezhdennoi; the unscathed hero of the fight – lit. nevredimyi geroi etoi bitvy; to come out with clean hands – lit. vyiti s chistymi rukami.

So there is no doubt that ethnocultural idiom specificity is the soul of any language (S. Ivanova, Z. Chanysheva, 2010). Reflecting the long process of formation and development of axiological ethnocultural space, phrases retain and in a unique way pass on the peculiarities of national mentality are from one generation to another.

Cognitive factors

Cognitive factors in the realm of phraseology are connected with the mechanisms of the associative and figurative outside world’s reflection in a human consciousness, and “the process of the appeared image-structures’ getting involved into linguistics” by means of the indirect and derivative nomination signs. Making a start from such kind of views, scholars began to speak about various linguistic world images (LWI). As our studies showed, the formation of phrases is a multivariant process due to which, in fact, the subjective and objective aura of the LWI is created. The nature of phraseological representation of the subjective world’s image is in many respects determined by a complex interlacing of multiple-vector human activity. The image of the world being explained from this point of view opens up great possibilities for phraseeme semiosis:

• to include the already metaphorically transformed reality in its linguorecreative arsenal,
• gives a chance to get out of that “dull” one-plane perception of the world,
• to make proper axiological emphases in its application field,
• to form a sensible world image in associative correlation between the subject and verbal images, subject and linguistic symbols. Cf.: Russian phraseeme del’ta shkuru neuitogo medvedya that with a tint of irony, of course, expresses ‘to revel in yet not reached goals; anticipating the results of yet not executed business, to build on anything not reasonable calculations, to divide
yet not received award’;
Belorus: на жывых мясе медведу скору кулявят, з незаўтаса ліса ф утра (кажду) шыя, скру гу лое фарбованы(прадаўший), не ску ў цвях не звоніў. Germ. man soll das Fell nicht verkauft, ehe man den Bären hat, lit. ‘ne sleduy prodavat’ shkuru, poka ne imeesh’ medvedya’; Eng, to cook a hare before catching him, lit. ‘zarit’ zaitza prezhde, chem on poimam’
to eat the calf the cow’s belly, lit. ‘est telenok, kotoruy eshe ne rodilsya’; catch the bear before you cook him, lit. ‘medvedya ne uivb, shkury ne prodavat’; don’t sell the bear’s skin before you have caught the bear, lit. ‘ne prodavai medvez’ei shkury, ne poimav sperva medvedya’; catch the bear before you sell his skin, lit. ‘prezhde poinai medvedya, a potom prodavai ego shkuru’.

Everything in these phraseme variations is capacious, multi-refractive and in process of advancing. It would seem, within one cognitive metaphor that ironically expresses the same sense, i.e. ‘to prematurely estimate the results of any business, to share profit from yet not carried out enterprise, undertaking’, phrasemes might lack any ethno-lingual specifics. However, in this case the value-semantic emphases are made in correspondence with the associations of their application field, too (Rus. медвед’ (bear), Belarus. lis (fox), Eng, telenok, zayats, ugr (calf, hare, eels)). And that is so, notwithstanding one and the same phraseme protosource. This phraseme became popular after the translation of the French fable “The Bear and the Travelers” (Cf.: L’ours et les deux compagnons) written by Jean de La Fontaine (1621 – 1695). The fact that proves the phraseme’s modernity of the ethno-lingual consciousness, looking for a proper designation for an already metaphorised discursive situation, is that yet in the 1930s of the 20th century it was accepted to speak as follows: ‘to sell (not to divide) the skin of a not yet killed bear‘ (‘prodavat’ (ne delit’) shkuru neubito go medvedya’). It is interesting to note that outside the historical and culturological context it may seem that the basis of this phraseme is represented by the all-European image since the lexical composition of both German and English phraseme contains the lexeme bear. Cf. Germ.: das Fell des Bärenverkauf ( تم يتلفل ليفروت). I assume that the cognitive nature of the phraseological process, b) conceptions, c) linguocreative thinking, and d) commonplace and conceptual perception of the world. The cognitive-discursive entity of such an aspect consists in the harmonization of subjective sensuous and ethnocultural factors of the phraseologisation process.

Sensory perceptual processes

The phraseme formation is related to the actualization of the sensory perceptual realisation products in the linguistic consciousness. This is rather a complicated mental scanning process of the object of phraseological nomination that is connected with the so called advancing reflection (P. Anohin, 1980). The phraseological semiosis intension on the signal of the prototypical word combination presupposes the implementation by linguistic consciousness a cognitive and metaphorical projection of the image of the primary denotatum to the sphere of the secondary denotative situation, referring sensually perceived signs to abstract and directly not observed objects. Such a cognitive scanning of the object of the phraseological nomination results in a discursive modus concept, i.e. a cognitive substratum of the semantic content of the phraseme. For example, the meaning “to be engaged in something obviously senseless, useless” can be rendered by the Russian phrasemes reshetom vodu nosit’ and tolerch’ vodu v stupe; Eng, to drop a bucket into an empty well; lit. ‘kidat’ vetrov pustoj kolodce; to beat the air, lit. ‘molotit’ vozduh; to mill the wind, lit. ‘na mel’nicu vetra; Germ. das Wasser pflügen, lit. ‘pahat’ vodu’. As exemplified, the cognitive metaphor forming the discursive modus concept and, in the act of the phraseological semiosis having caused or created, the resemblance between some remote from each other and world illustration object is possible. Such a conscious transfer from one denotatum to another one associated with it. Owing to this fact, at generation and perception of the phrase-centered statement the advancing reflection serves as the main neurocognitive mechanism of modelling of the secondary denotative situation (N. Aleirenko, 2010: 58 – 65), which is denoted by a phraseme. This mechanism that brings the sensory perceptual processes and the reflection into effect uses the elements of anticipation. In cognitive phraseology anticipation is responsible for representation of subjects in indirect nomination in a human mind long before they are really perceived and realised.

The distinction of the phraseme forming anticipation process through the prism of the advancing reflection creates a conceptual bridge (E. Vityaev’s term) that connects the rational anticipation of the phraseological denotatum with its emotive and figurative conception. Thus in the phraseme [sstrōt’] vozdushnye zamki touched upon above, such a conceptual bridge leads to the actualization of such evaluating components as ‘impracticability’ of ideas, their ‘unrealizability’. Causing the appearance of a phraseme forming concept in a linguistic consciousness, and defining the nature of its representants, the conceptual bridge also serves as a mechanism of appearance of the phraseme’s emotive components in the course of the phraseological process. Thus the revealing the translational layer in the designate component basing on the theory of emotion developed by Pavel V. Simonov (P. Simonov, 1981). In the light of his approach, the phrase semantic has to be studied not as a insignificant component that is outside the phraseological semantics, but as its weighty constituent part. According to this theory, emotive component of phraseological meaning by its nature represents the human mind’s reflection product of an actual need and possibility of its actualization is established by us on the basis of genetic and prior ethnocultural experience. For example: – Churmenyaev. Tol’ko chto otmena vyshe. Pryamo Gogolev:.. Ne v perenosnom.. – bukval’nom smysle! Menya v vosennadtsati stranakh izdali – ya o sebe nikogda takogo vseh ne vidal. A ne vseh ne videl Chto...? Da chto iz včera ‘Zhenshchinu v kresle’. Bred sivoi kobyli! (Yury Polyakov, “Goatling in milk”, p. 182). The prototype of the phraseme bred sivoi kobyli (the grey mare’s nonsense) seems to be abracadabra. First of all, the epithet turns out to be absurd: why the mare is grey,
but not any other colour? It appears that its emergence in the component structure of the phrase is caused by an ethnocultural factor: it was a popular belief that a grey horse was considered a silly animal; its appearance in a dream was taken as a lie harbinger. CE vrać kaksinky merin (to lie as a grey gelding). The lexeme bređ (nonsense) was, probably, a component part of the phrase used in its secondary meaning – ‘chatter’. Cf. Rus. dial.: bređa – ‘the talker, the fool’, Ukr., Belorus. brednyč – ‘lies’, old Pol. bredźici – ‘to chatter’, ubrđać sobie – ‘to hammer (drive) into the head’. Franc Miklošić and Erich Berneker considered these words going back to the verbal forms ‘bredi, bresti’. This explanation is confirmed by the examples like sumaskrōd, originally ‘gone crazy’. By the way, Niolaas van Wijk compared these words with Middle Low Germ., Middle Dutch praten – ‘to talk, to chatter’, Eng. ‘prate’, chat, chatterbox, to prate – ‘to talk foolishly or tediously about something’.

Linguocreative thinking and ordinary conceptual perception of the world

In terms of explanation of ethnocultural phrase specifics (D. Dobrovol’skii, 1998: 48; L. Zainullina, 2005), conceptions represent a reflection product of a set of the brightest external, sensually perceived certain signs of a subject or a phenomenon. On the other hand, these are images generalized by ethnocultural experience. The most specific feature of conception is that demonstrativeness and generality are connected within it. Exactly in such a two-unity idea the conception of that denotive situation which is designated by the phrase bređ stvoi kohily is formed. The interaction between the etymological meaning of the lexical component bređ and the symbolical figurativeness of the phrase sivaya kohyła – ‘nonsense’ creates the semantic content ‘the obvious nonsense proceeding from a silly being’. Its discursive associative communication creates the semantic content ‘the obvious nonsense proceeding from a silly being’. It forms a basis to a unconsciousness of the patient’.

Therefore, everything that can be interpreted in terms of evaluativity, creates national and cultural specifics in phraseology (V. Telija, 1996: 214). This understanding is specified by Natalya M. Firsova (2004: 51-52) treating national phrase specifics as manifestation of their original signs that reflect (explicitly or implicitly) both actually linguistic and extralinguistic (social, historical, cultural, psychological, ethnic) realia of any national cultural community.

In our concept of a phrase semiosis we differentiate phraseological universals and phraseological uniqueness. The typology of phraseological unique is caused by the system of universal concepts such as life, death, immortality, conscience, sin, evil, moral norms and values dominating in the society; b) household culture; c) cultural factors influencing the formation of phraseological universals and unique is the only possible one. Some scientists as a subject of the alanalysis choose national and cultural language specificstics. The point of view of Nikolai A. Berdyaev recognizing culture national is the cornerstone of such an approach: “The culture was never and will never be abstract human, it is always specifically human, i.e. national” (N. Berdyaev, 1997: 85). It is precisely this philosophical view that became basic for Veronika N. Telija’s research that investigated the national and cultural specifics of Russian phrases, everything that can be interpreted in terms of evaluativity, creates national and cultural specifics in phraseology (V. Telija, 1996: 214). This understanding is specified by Natalya M. Firsova (2004: 51-52) treating national phrase specifics as manifestation of their original signs that reflect (explicitly or implicitly) both actually linguistic and extralinguistic (social, historical, cultural, psychological, ethnic) realia of any national cultural community.

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