ԲԱՆԱՎԷՁ ԵՎ ՔՆՆԱՐԿՈՒՄ

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LEXICOSEMANTIC PECULIARITICS
OF IDIOMS IN ENGLISH

Idioms, or conventionalized multiword expressions, often but not always non–literal, are hardly marginal in English, though they have been relatively neglected in lexical studies of the language. This neglect is especially evident in respect of the functions of idioms. One of the aims of this article accordingly, is to account for the ubiquity of idioms by analysing what they do in different discourse types, both spoken and written. *Bread and butter, red herring, spill the beans, bless you, go to hell, on the contrary,* and *in sum* are idioms put to different functional uses. *Bread and butter* 'livelihood' constitutes a package of information, a specific experiential representation, working together with the other packages of information carried by its co–text to convey a message, for example, *It was a simple bread and butter issue,* part of the text fragment cited below. *Bless you* signalling conviviality and *go to hell* signalling conflict, on the other hand, are expressions indicating a speaker and addressee, usually physically present, in an interpersonal exchange. *In sum* and *on the contrary* are different again, performing as they do a relational role between the parts of a discourse, the conclusion to a text in the first instance and a denial of the preceding statement in the second.

The three language functions identified by Halliday (1973, 1985) can also be usefully applied to part of a language, in this case a component of the vocabulary, namely idioms. We have retained Halliday's terms *ideational* and *interpersonal* to describe two of the functions idioms perform, but I have replaced the third term *textual,* signifying cohesive relationships within a text, with *relational,* a term which captures more precisely the connective functions carried out by this idiom type in achieving both cohesion and coherence.

One of the aims of this article, as stated above, is to explore the functions of idioms – *what* purposes they fulfil. A second and complementary aim is to show *how* they are used, for how they are used enhances what they are meant to do, a claim which brings us to the thesis of this study:

When language–users produce discourse, they usually combine the novel and the conventional in varying degrees.

The conventional and novel use of *bread and butter* in:

It was a simple *bread and butter* issue I examined *my bread* very closely to see where it was *buttered. (The Australian,* 29 June 1991).

Is a good example of this practice: both uses convey the idiomatic meaning but the second, a variation of the idiom, is also a play on the literal meaning of this expression.

Ideational idioms attract word play whereas interpersonal and relational ones tend to be conventionally used.

We began this article by referring to the relative neglect of idioms in lexical studies. Such a claim does not mean that no substantial work has been done on the topic. What it means is that the treatment of idioms in comparison with similarly ubiquitous phenomena such as metaphor is less rounded: much past work on idioms focuses on their form and, to a lesser extent, on their semantics to the neglect of their discoursal functions. However, the ubiquity of idioms is fully explainable only in terms of these functions.

Though little has been done on idioms and idiomaticity in comparison with other areas of English vocabulary, there is enough to warrant selectivity. The work we have chosen for comment identify those linguistic features seen as characteristic of idioms and so are useable as defining criteria. Additionally, by exploring the structural and semantic properties of idioms, these works provide insights useful in explaining why and how idioms perform the functions they do.

As the scholars discussed below work from different theoretical standpoints, differences of opinion exist; yet differences among some scholars are balanced by agreements among others. Both differences and agreements, will be clear from the review making up the rest of this article. It is, however, useful to preface this discussion with the most frequently mentioned features of idioms:

1. Compositeness: idioms are commonly accepted as a type of multiword expression (*red herring, make up, smell a rat, the coast is clear,* etc.) though a few scholars (Hockett 1958; Katz and Postal 1963) accept even single words as idioms.

2. Institutionalization: idioms are conventionalized expressions.

3. Semantic opacity: the meaning of an idiom is not the sum of its constituents. In other words, an idiom is often non–literal.

The widespread occurrence of these three features in common word combinations has resulted in many types of multiword expressions identified by some other term such as *slang, proverbs, allusions, similes, dead metaphors, social formulae,* and *collocations* also being identified as idioms, a practice evident in the works discussed below. This review of works on idioms and idiomaticity covers two overlapping but slightly different aspects of the field: Makkai (1972) ; Weinreich (1969) ; Fraser (1970) ; and Strassler (1982) focus on lexically and grammatically regular idioms; Roberts (1944) ; Smith (1925) ; Jespersen (1924) ; and Fillmore *et al.* (1988) focus on the idiosyncrasies of English, many of which are lexically and grammatically irregular. Cowie *et al.* (1975, 1983) include both types in their two idiom dictionaries.

Makkai's *Idiom Structure in English,* an extended version of his doctoral thesis (1965), identifies two major types of idioms: those of encoding and decoding.

A form of expression, grammatical construction, phrase etc., peculiar to a language; a peculiarity of phraseology approved by the usage of a language, and often having a significance other than its grammatical or logical one.

Idioms of decoding such as the non–literal *red herring, take the bull by the horns,* etc. are the focus of Makkai's attention in his book, not those of encoding as exemplified by the English *drive at 70 m. p. h.* instead of *with* as in French, both constructions peculiar to their respective languages.

Following the tradition of Soviet phraseology as developed by Vinogradov, Amosova, Babkin, Sanskij, Mel'cuk, and others, as well as the Anglo tradition established by Weinrich (1969), Healey (1968), and others, Makkai reserves the term *idiom* for units realized by at least two words. These units are glossed as 'any polylexonic lexeme made up of more than one minimal free form or word (as defined by morphotactic criteria)' (Makkai 1972: 122). Requiring an idiom to have at least two independent lexical items excludes expressions consisting of one free form and one or more bound forms added by affixation as the grammar provides adequate decoding rules for such types. Thus, as Makkai argues, the suffix *–wards* has the meaning 'in the direction of in *forwards, backwards,* etc., as well as in the more unusual *Chicagowards, "'treewards,* and: [|]*pigwards,* the last from *Lord Emsworth ambled pigwards,* stated by Makkai to be from one of the works of P. G. Wodehouse. Noun + *wards* has a predictable meaning, hence all new forms created on this pattern are similarly interpretable. By contrast, the meaning of an idiom is not predictable from its component parts, which are empty of their usual senses.

However, though the constituents of an idiom are empty of their usual senses when the expression is interpreted idiomatically as in *hot potato* 'embarrassing issue', the individual constituents of *hot potato* should be capable of occurring with their customary or literal meanings 'food item at a high temperature'. The potential ambiguity of idioms of decoding, what Makkai calls their 'disinformation potential', arises from this capacity. Accordingly, expressions with unique elements like *kith* in *kith and kin* (Makkai's example) incapable of appearing in other discoursal environments and hence non–ambiguous, are disqualified as real idioms. Such requirements establish disinformation potential as another key criterion of idiomaticity for Makkai. Consequently, disinformation needs to be distinguished from misinformation, a feature of homonyms, Makkai's example of such a homonymous expression being _She bears children,_ 'carries', 'gives birth to'. According to Makkai, the disinformation potential of idioms of decoding allows for the possibility that the hearer 'will decode the idiom in a logical yet sememically erroneous way'.

Makkai classifies idioms of decoding as *lexemic* and *sememic,* giving greater attention to the structure of the lexemic variety. Six types of lexemic idioms are identified: phrasal verbs *{bring up, get away with,* etc.) ; tournures *(fly off the handle, rain cats and dogs,* etc.) ; irreversible binomials *{salt and pepper, bag and baggage,* etc.) ; phrasal compounds *{blackmail, high–handed,* etc.) ; incorporating verbs *{eavesdrop, man handle,* etc.) ; and pseudo–idioms *(spick and span, kith and kin,* etc.).

Thus in this article we try to draw attention to the variety of multiword expressions identified as idioms as well as to their centrality in English. Both these factors require the idiomatologist to define idioms in such a way that the definition captures this range and accordingly their centrality without being at the same time a catch–all for every word combination in a language.

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ԴԱՐՁՎԱԾՔԱՅԻՆ ՄԻԱՎՈՐՆԵՐԻ ԲԱՌԻՄԱՍՏԱՅԻՆ ԱՌԱՆՁՆԱՀԱՏԿՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՆԵՐԸ ԱՆԳԼԵՐԵՆՈՒՄ

Սույն հոդվածը նվիրված է անգլերենի դարձվածքային միավորների իմաստաբոր-ծառական առանձնահատկություններին: Հոդվածում հեղինակը փորձել է ներկայացնել դիտարկվող միավորների իմաստային բնույթագիրը, հուզագնահատողական հարի-մաստները, վերլուծել դարձվածքային միավորների խորիրդանշական կիրառույունը:

Р. САНДУХЧЯН

ЛЕКСИКО—СИМАНТИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ ФРАЗЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ ЕДИНИЦ В АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

На современном этапе развития лингвистики большую актуальность приобретают исследования различных микросистем. Данная статья посвящена анализу английских фразеологических единиц. В рамках исследуемого языка предпринята попытка рассмотреть фразеологическую единицу как знак, отражающий лингвокультурологическую реальность. Также дается смысловой анализ сопоставляемых единиц, опираясь на разные принципы.