

Anna Jansone
Daugavpils University, Latvia

PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS WITH THE ELEMENTS REFERRING TO ‘LIFE’ OR ‘DEATH’ IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN

Abstract

Nowadays a number of scholars turn their attention to the science of phraseology. One of the ideas, is connected with the understanding of phraseological units as phenomena of culture, and therefore the functioning of them is investigated in cultural context. Thus phraseology has entered the sphere of sociolinguistics. To the author's mind, one of the best definitions of phraseological units is as follows: it is a stable, coherent combination of words with partially or fully figurative meaning. In the present article the author presents the research of phraseological units with the elements referring to ‘Life’ or ‘Death’ in English and Russian and tries to classify them as to their belonging to particular semantic groups. The present analysis may be useful for those who learn language and want to enlarge their knowledge about phraseological units.

Key words: *phraseology, phraseological unit, life, death*

Phraseological units reflect the wealth of a language displaying cultural paradigms of the speakers of a particular language. They reflect cultural archetypes of an ethno-linguistic community and help to make explicit the peculiarities of its world perception.

Phraseological units as the particular units of language came into the focus of linguists' attention in the beginning of the 20th century. In the second part of the 20th century these word-combinations became the object of scientific investigation.

The field of phraseology (or idiomaticity) in any language is so varied and fascinating that one could spend an entire lifetime considering and analysing it from various viewpoints. A phraseological unit is an established, universal and essential element that, used with care, ornaments and enriches the language.

Phraseological units are interesting because they are colourful and lively and because they are linguistic curiosities. At the same time, they are difficult because they have unpredictable meanings and grammar, and often have special connotations. Research into phraseological units shows that they have important role in language.

The **aim** of the present work is to carry out the research of the phraseological units containing in their structure the elements ‘life’ and ‘death’ in English and Russian.

To achieve the aim some **tasks** are determined, e.g.:

- ✓ To study and analyse various definitions of phraseological units;
- ✓ To classify the phraseological units as to their belongings to particular semantic groups.

To accomplish the tasks and achieve the aim the following **research methods** are used:

- ✓ Study and analyse theoretical literature relating to the object of research;

- ✓ Study of the dictionaries in search for the phraseological units with the elements 'life' or 'death' in English and Russian, etc.

The **object** of the research is the phraseological units with the elements referring to 'life' or 'death' in English and Russian.

THE CONCEPT OF A PHRASEOLOGICAL UNIT

Michael McCarthy and Felicity O'Dell use the term 'idiom' in their book 'English Idioms in Use' and write that idioms are fixed expressions which have a meaning that is not immediately obvious from looking at the individual words. (McCarthy, O'Dell 1994:6)

Hockett claims that it is a phrase whose meaning is non-compositional, that is the meaning of the whole cannot be fully deduced from the meanings of the parts. (Hockett 1958:15)

The English scholar U. Weinreich asserts that idiom is a phraseological unit involving at least two polysemous constituents and there is a reciprocal contextual section of subsenses.

J. Strassler's definition of an idiom is as follows: "An idiom is a concatenation of more than one lexeme whose meaning is not derived from the meanings of its constituents and which does not consist of a verb plus adverbial particle or preposition." (Strassler 1982:24)

Though there are differences in opinions, all linguists agree that phraseological units or idioms are probably "*the most picturesque, colourful and expressive part of the language vocabulary, which reflect nation's customs, traditions and prejudices, recollections of its past history, scraps of folk songs and fairy tales. But it is necessary to distinguish them from other words and phrases existing in the language*".

R.S.Ginzburg also accepts the term "phraseological units" and the definition given by her is the following: "Phraseological units are [...] non-motivated word-groups that cannot be freely made up in speech but are reproduced as ready-made units." (Ginzburg 1966:190)

In her turn N.N.Amosova defines phraseological units as units of fixed context, that is a context characterized by a specific and unchanging sequence of definite lexical components and a peculiar semantic relationship existing between them. (АМОСОВА 1963:97)

The English authors Jennifer Seidl and W.McMordie in their book "English Idioms and How to Use Them" state: "An idiom is a number of words which, taken together, mean something different from the individual words of the idiom when they stand alone. The way in which the words are put together is often odd, illogical or even grammatically incorrect. [...] We have to learn the idiom as a whole and we often cannot change any part of it." (Seidl, McMordie 1983:48)

Ch.Bally's theory which states that the main feature of a phraseological unit is possibility or impossibility to replace it by one single word. (Кунин 1970:23)

The concept of 'phraseologic unit (unite phraseologique) has been first used by Charles Bally, wherefrom it was taken by V.V. Vinogradov and other Soviet linguists, who translated it by 'frazelogiceskaja edinita'. He defines them as ready-made language units that are taken from one generation to another and are used in the process of speech as traditional word-combinations.

Shansky defines phraseologisms as 'frozen patterns of language that consist of two or more components and allow little or no variation in form, structure or meaning'. (Шанский 1969:91)

Another linguist, Senina, defines phraseological units as a semantically bound set of words that are not produced at the moment of conversation but are reproduced as a rigid lexico-grammatical units with a firm semantical background. (Сенина 2010:165)

Another outstanding Russian linguist A.V.Kunin having done an elaborate research comes to the conclusion that phraseological units are stable combinations of words with a fully or partially figurative meaning. (Кунин 1970:78)

This definition is best suited for the purpose as it includes two inherent properties of phraseological units: stability and figurative meaning which differentiate these units from free word combinations and also from set expressions with no figurative meaning.

The same understanding of a phraseological unit is shared also by Latvian scholars A.Naciscione , A.Veisbergs.

CLASSIFICATIONS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

A.J.Smirnitsky classifies phraseological units according to their stylistic features:

- 1) phraseological units (stylistically neutral, with faded metaphorical motivation, e.g., *be in love, fall in love*);
- 2) idioms (they are based on metaphor, they are emotionally and stylistically coloured, e.g., *cool as a cucumber*).

I.Arnold classifies phraseological units according to the type of the component parts and the functioning of the whole. She states that "structured like phrases they function like words". (Arnold 1966:38)

There are seven types of phraseological units in I.Arnold's structural classification:

- 1) nominal phrases, e.g., *high life*
- 2) verbal phrases, e.g., *put one's head in a noose*
- 3) adverbial phrases, e.g., *by hook or by crook*
- 4) adjectival phrases, e.g., *as wet as a drowned rat*

- 5) prepositional phrases, e.g., *in accordance with*
- 6) conjunctive phrases, e.g., *as long as*
- 7) interjectional phrases, e.g., *well, I never did!*

The Russian scholar A.I.Molotkov classifies phraseological units of the Russian language taking into account that the lexical meaning of a phraseological unit and its grammatical categories form the content of a phraseological unit (in contrast to its form), with which the lexical-grammatical characteristic of a phraseological unit is connected: nominal, verbal, adjectival, adverbial, verbal-prepositional; interjectional phraseological units. (Молотков 1978:46)

Another classification in which there are two principles applied is established by N.Amosova. She distinguishes two types of phraseological units:

- 1) phrasemes (units of fixed context in which one of the components has specialized meaning dependent on the second component, e.g., *small talk, fair sex*);
- 2) idioms (idioms are semantically and grammatically inseparable units, e.g., *play with fire*). (Амосова 1963:69)

Taking into account the comparative analysis of different classifications of phraseological units which the author has observed, she has to admit that the following classification worked out by A.V.Kunin can be considered the most detailed one. He has critically examined most of the existing classifications and elaborated his own classification of phraseological units which is based on more thorough analysis of these phenomena of language. In his classification A.V.Kunin keeps a close watch to the elements of phraseology which have not been emphasized by other researchers, as well as takes into consideration also the development of the English language. Since A.V.Kunin's classification of phraseological units is grounded on wide theoretical and practical material concerning different languages, the author of the present article assumes that this classification could be applied also to the phraseological systems of other languages.

Kunin has worked out a structural-semantic classification, which reveals the function of a phraseological unit depending on its size (collocations or sentences).

It was managed to analyse 7 dictionaries (see bibliography) and it is found the following quantity of phraseological units with the elements referring to 'life' or 'death' in English and Russian:

- ✓ Russian PUs with the element 'death' – 21;
- ✓ Russian PUs with the element 'life' – 55;
- ✓ English PUs with the element 'death' – 189;
- ✓ English PUs with the element 'life' – 291.

The author has tried to divide them according to Kunin's classification. He has worked out a structural-semantic classification, which reveals the function of a phraseological unit depending on its size (collocations or sentences).

- ❖ Nominative phraseological units, which stand for a certain notion denoting things, actions and qualities (properties).

They can be:

- Substantive phraseological units:

Here 14 Russian phraseological units were found out, and 118 English phraseological units correspondently. E.g.:

- ✓ Мёртвая тишина;
- ✓ Семь смертных грехов;
- ✓ Живая душа;
- ✓ Собачья жизнь;
- ✓ Dead sleep;
- ✓ Dead sea apple;
- ✓ Dead line;
- ✓ The morning of life;
- ✓ The afternoon of life;
- ✓ Still life, etc.

- Adjectival phraseological units:

In this group it was found 8 Russian and 17 English phraseological units. E.g.:

- ✓ Страшный как смертный грех;
- ✓ Смертельно бледный;
- ✓ Живого места не оставить;
- ✓ Живуч как кошка;
- ✓ Dead as a doornail;
- ✓ Sick to death;
- ✓ As large as life, etc.

- Adverbial phraseological units: (No Russian phraseological units and 8 English phraseological units were found):

- ✓ Never say die;
- ✓ Worse than death;
- ✓ Still as death;

- ✓ Anything for quiet life;
- ✓ For dear life;
- ✓ As much as one's life is worth.

❖ Nominative- Communicative phraseological units (phraseological units belonging to this class are verbal).

It was found 38 Russian and 219 English phraseological units:

- ✓ Подписать самому себе смертный приговор;
- ✓ Умереть о скуки;
- ✓ Сдвинуться с мёртвой точки;
- ✓ Спать мертвецким сном;
- ✓ Жить не по средствам;
- ✓ Жить припеваючи;
- ✓ Вести двойную жизнь;
- ✓ Dice with death;
- ✓ Pay for a dead horse;
- ✓ Die with laughter;
- ✓ Live from hand to mouth;
- ✓ Live in clover;
- ✓ Give a new lease of life;
- ✓ To lead a fast life, etc.

❖ Interjectional phraseological units (those which express emotions and feelings):

(here it was found 2 Russian and 29 English phraseological units):

- ✓ Ни в жизнь!
- ✓ Ну живчик!
- ✓ Drop dead!
- ✓ Do or die!
- ✓ Not on your life!
- ✓ Such is life!
- ✓ Your money or your life!

❖ Communicative phraseological units (those with the structure of a simple, complex or compound sentences. A.V.Kunin distinguishes two types of communicative phraseological units: proverbs ad sayings), e.g.:

- ✓ Перед смертью все равны;
- ✓ Жить как кошка с собакой;
- ✓ Век живи – век учись;

- ✓ Death is a great leveller;
- ✓ Cowards die many times, the brave but once;
- ✓ Life is not a bed of roses;
- ✓ Art is long, life is short
- ✓ When Queen Anne was alive, etc.

The author of the present article assumes that a phraseological unit is a word-combination with fully or partially transferred meaning and a stable syntactic structure of a coordinate or subordinate word-combination, simple or complex sentence.

Phraseology as an integral part of a language still demands further complex and interdisciplinary investigations in which the different humanities and social science methods are used.

Bibliography

1. Antrushina, G.B. (1985) *English Lexicology*. Высшая школа: Москва
2. Arnold, I. (1966) *The English Word*.- Moscow: Prosveshcheniye
3. Fernando, Ch.(1996) *Idioms and Idiomaticity*. Oxford University Press
4. Ginzburg, R.S. (1966) *A Course in Modern English Lexicology*. –Moscow: Higher School Publishing House
5. Hockett, Charles F. (1958) *A Course in Modern Linguistics*. New York: Macmillan
6. McCathy, M, O’Dell, F. (1994) *English Vocabulary in Use*. Cambridge University Press
7. Naciscione, A. (2001) *Phraseological Units in Discourse: Towards Applied Stylistics*. – Riga: Latvian Academy of Culture
8. Seidl J., McMordie W. (1983) *English Idioms and How to Use Them*. – Moscow: Vysshaya shkola
9. Strassler, J. (1982) *Idioms in English: a Pragmatic Analysis*. Tubingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.
10. Veisbergs, A. (1999) *Idioms in Latvian*. Riga: University of Latvia
11. Амбражейчик, А. (2007) *2000 русских 2000 английских идиом фразеологизмов и устойчивых словосочетаний* . Попурри, Минск
12. Амосова, Н. Н. (1963) *Основы английской фразеологии*. – Ленинград: Наука
13. Брускина, Т. Л., Шитова, Л.Ф. (1999) *Краткий русско-английский фразеологический словарь*. Санкт-Петербург
14. Винокуров, А. (2009) *Англо-русский словарь идиом*. Мартин, Москва
15. Григорьева, А. И. (2010) *1000 русских 1000 английских идиом, фразеологизмов и устойчивых словосочетаний* . Сова, Москва, Санкт-Петербург.
16. Дубровин, М. (1997) *Сборник идиом на пяти языках*. Росмэн, Москва
17. Инфантова, Г. Г., Барлас, Л. Г., Сейфулин, М. Г., Сенина, Н. А., (2010) *Русский язык: введение в науку о языке: лексикология, этимология, фразеология, лексикография*. Москва: Академический проект.
18. Кунин, А.В. (1970) *Английская фразеология*. Теоретический курс. – Москва: Высшая школа
19. Кунин, А. В. (1956) *Англо-русский фразеологический словарь*. Государственное издательство иностранных словарей, Москва
20. Молотков, А.И (1978) *Фразеологический словарь русского языка* - Москва: Русский язык
21. Пархамович, Т. В. (2000) *1000 русских 1000 английских идиом*. Попурри, Минск

22. Шанский, Н. М. (1969) *Фразеология современного русского языка*. Москва: Высшая школа.