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FEATURES CLASSIFICATION IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN
ENGLISH AND AMERICAN VOCABULARY

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Abstract: A phraseological unit is a complex phenomenon with a number of important features, which can therefore be approached from different points of view. Hence, there exist a considerable number of different classification systems devised by different scholars and based on different principles.

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The traditional and oldest principle for classifying phraseological units is based on their original content and might be alluded to as "thematic" (although the term is not universally accepted). The approach is widely used in numerous English and American guides to idiom, phrase books, etc. On this principle, idioms are classified according to their sources of origin, "source" referring to the particular sphere of human activity, of life of nature, of natural phenomena, etc. So, L. P. Smith gives in his classification groups of idioms used by sailors, fishermen, soldiers, hunters and associated with the realia, phenomena and conditions of their occupations. In Smith's classification we also find groups of idioms associated with domestic and wild animals and birds, agriculture and cooking. The term does not seem appropriate since we usually mean something different when we speak of the etymology of a word or word-group: whether the word (or word-group) is native or borrowed, and, if the latter, what is the source of borrowing. It is true that Smith makes a special study of idioms borrowed from other languages, but that is only a relatively small part of his classification system. The general principle is not etymological.

Smith points out that word-groups associated with the sea and the life of seamen are especially numerous in English vocabulary. Most of them have long since developed metaphorical meanings which have no longer any association with the sea or sailors. Here are some examples.

To be all at sea - to be unable to understand; to be in a state of ignorance or bewilderment about something (e. g. How can I be a judge in a situation in which I am all at sea? I'm afraid I'm all at sea in this problem). V. H. Collins remarks that the metaphor is that of a boat tossed about, out of control, with its occupants not knowing where they are.

To sink or swim - to fail or succeed (e. g. It is a case of sink or swim. All depends on his own effort.)

In deep water - in trouble or danger.

In low water, on the rocks - in strained financial circumstances.

To be in the same boat with somebody - to be in a situation in which people share the same difficulties and dangers (e. g. I don't like you much, but seeing that we're in the same boat I'll back you all I can). The metaphor is that of passengers in the life-boat of a sunken ship.

To sail under false colours - to pretend to be what one is not; sometimes, to pose as a friend and, at the same time, have hostile intentions. The metaphor is that of an enemy ship that approaches its intended prey showing at the mast the flag ("colours") of a pretended friendly nation.

To show one's colours - to betray one's real character or intentions. The allusion is, once more, to a ship showing the flag of its country at the mast.

To strike one's colours - to surrender, give in, admit one is beaten. The metaphor refers to a ship's hauling down its flag (sign of surrender).

To weather (to ride out) the storm - to overcome difficulties; to have courageously stood against misfortunes.

To bow to the storm - to give in, to acknowledge one's defeat.

Half seas over (sl.) - drunk.

According to the degree of idiomatic meaning of various groups of phraseological units, V.V. Vinogradov classified them as follows:

Phraseological fusions are units “whose meaning cannot be deduced from the meanings of their component parts, the meaning of phraseological fusions is unmotivated at the present stage of language development.”[2]. “Such word-groups represent the highest stage of blending together. The meaning of components is completely absorbed by the meaning of the whole, by its expressiveness and emotional properties.”[6].

Phraseological fusions are specific for every language and do not lend themselves to literal translation into other languages:

- To come a cropper - to come to disaster;
- Neck and crop - entirely, altogether;
- At sixes and sevens - in confusion or in disagreement;
- To leave smb. In the lurch - to abandon a friend when he is in trouble;

Phrasemes are two-member groups in which one of the members has a particular meaning dependent on the second components it is found only in the given context, e.g. in small hours - the second component (hours) serves as the only clue to this particular meaning of the first component. Phrasemes are always binary, e.g. in small talk, husband's tea, one of the components has a phraseologically bound meaning, the other serves as a distinguishing context.

Idioms are distinguished from phrasemes by the idiomaticity of the whole word-group. The difference between phrasemes and idioms is based on semantic relationship without accepting the structural approach, and the demarcation line between the two groups seems rather subjective”[2].

We may see that the approaches to the classification of phraseological units differ from native linguists to foreign linguists. This fact should be included while studying of the critical literature and manuals. The proper understanding gives the better result of the research work and helps in searching of the idioms concerning the subject.

Phraseological units can be also classified according to the way they are formed. A.V. Kunin pointed out primary and secondary ways of forming phraseological units.

Primary ways of forming phraseological units are those when a unit is formed on the basis of a free word-group:

- a) the most productive in Modern English is the formation of phraseological units by means of transferring the meaning of terminological word-groups;
- b) a large group of phraseological units was formed by transforming the meaning of free word groups , e.g. granny farm, Trojan horse - «a person or thing used secretly to cause the ruin of an enemy»;
- c) phraseological units can be formed by means of alliteration , e.g. a sad sack, culture vulture;
- d) phraseological units can be formed by means of distorting a word group , e.g. odds and ends was formed from «odd ends»;

Secondary ways of forming phraseological units are those when a phraseological unit is formed on the basis of another phraseological unit; they are:

- a) conversion , e.g. to vote with one's feet was converted into vote with one's feet;
- b) changing the grammar form , e.g. Make hay while the sun shines is transferred into a verbal phrase - to make hay while the sun shines;
- c) shortening of proverbs or sayings , e.g. the phraseological unit to make a sow's ear was formed from the proverb - You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear by means of clipping the middle of it;
- d) borrowing phraseological units from other languages , either as translation loans, e.g. living space (German), to take the bull by the horns (Latin), or by means of phonetic borrowings, e.g. meche blanche (French), corpse d'elite (French), sotto voce(Italian) etc. [6]

We may see how phraseological units are formed. Trying to select phraseological units from the great variety of them this knowledge helps to shortcut the list and to find certain idioms faster.

The class of phraseological units describing human appearance may be divided into several subclasses, according to the object which is described. It comes as follows:

1. Facial features, beauty - one may be attractive or ugly. One's face may express different emotions, such as anger, happiness etc.

face like thunder - somebody looks very angry.

2. Eyes - one's eyes may have different shape or express different emotions.
pie-eyed - completely drunk.

3. Nose - one's nose may be big or small, hooked or straight.
snub nose - a small nose that curves up at the end

4. Hair - one may have hair or not, or lose hair. Different hair-styles may be described.
thin on the top - If someone, usually a man, is thin on the top, they are losing their hair or going bald.

5. Beard - PUs are used to describe the shape of it.
A young gentleman with a Vandyke beard was talking loudly.

An idiom may be treated as a natural manner of speaking to a native speaker of a language. So idioms are integral part of language which make our speech more colourful and authentically native.

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