

IDIOMS AS A DISTINCT CATEGORY IN PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS CLASSIFICATION

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Abstract

The article examines the concept of phraseology and the classification of phraseological units with particular attention to the phenomenon of idioms. Drawing on the works of leading scholars such as A.V. Kunin, V.V. Vinogradov, N.M. Shansky, A.I. Smirnitsky, N.N. Amosova, and others, the study traces the development of the term phraseology and analyzes various approaches to categorizing phraseological units. Special emphasis is placed on idioms as a distinct type of phraseological unit characterized by semantic indivisibility, stability, imagery, and stylistic coloring.

Keywords: Idioms, phraseological unit, phraseme, phraseologism, phraseology.

Introduction

Phraseology occupies a significant place in modern linguistics, as it represents a complex and multifaceted area of study concerned with the stability, semantic integrity, and cultural specificity of language. The study of phraseological units enables researchers to gain insight into the mechanisms of meaning formation, lexical creativity, and the figurative potential of language. In recent decades, phraseology has evolved from a descriptive branch of lexicology into an independent linguistic discipline with its own theoretical framework, methodology, and system of terminology.

The importance of phraseological research lies in its ability to reveal the national and cultural worldview encoded in stable word combinations. These units, often carrying metaphorical and expressive meanings, form a significant part of both



everyday speech and literary language. Consequently, the analysis of phraseological units – and idioms in particular – contributes to a deeper understanding of linguistic imagery, cultural identity, and stylistic richness.

Given the diversity of approaches and the terminological complexity surrounding this field, it is essential to trace the evolution of the concept of *phraseology* and to examine how scholars have classified and interpreted phraseological units. Particular attention should be paid to the phenomenon of *idioms*, which represent one of the most semantically integrated and stylistically marked types of phraseological units.

The term “phraseology” was introduced by Ch. Bally in the meaning of “a branch of stylistics that studies phrases.” According to A.V. Kunin’s phraseology is the science of phraseological units, i.e. about stable combinations of words with complicated semantics that are not formed according to generative structural-semantic models of variable combinations [КуНИН, 1996; 4].

In the Linguistic Encyclopedic Dictionary phraseology is defined as a branch of linguistics that studies the current state and historical development of the phraseological structure of a language and as a set of phraseological units of this language, that is, as the phraseological structure of a language [Ярцева, 2002; 560-561].

Z.T. Tukhtakhodjaeva by the phraseology means a branch of linguistics that deals with all types of set expressions characterized by a certain transfer of meaning [Tukhtakhodjaeva and others, 2019; 124].

The definitions above demonstrate that phraseology is viewed as both a linguistic discipline and a system of stable expressions. To understand its scope more precisely, it is necessary to define its central concept – the *phraseological unit* – and explore how such units are classified in linguistic theory.

The main concept of phraseology is the concept of a phraseological unit, which can be used synonymously with such terms as “phraseologism” and “phraseme”. One of the key problems of general phraseology is the classification of phraseological units. Let us consider the main approaches of phraseologists. This is necessary for a more precise definition of the status of idioms in the system of phraseological units, since it is idioms that are the focus of this study. Their



classification and features of interpretation in scientific literature allow us to identify key features that distinguish idioms from other types of phraseological units. Among the numerous approaches to classification, the typology proposed by V.V. Vinogradov [1972] has become foundational and continues to influence modern phraseological research.

V.V. Vinogradov [1972] identified three types of phraseological units:

1. Phraseological fusions, or idioms – unmotivated units that act as equivalents of words.
2. Phraseological unities are motivated units with a single integral meaning, arising from the fusion of the meanings of lexical components. Phraseological unities allow the expansion of components by means of a substitute “packaging material and act as potential equivalents of words”. V.V. Vinogradov also includes in the composition of phraseological unities word groups that are terms.
3. Phraseological collocations are phrase in which one of the components has a phraseologically related meaning that manifests itself only in connection with a strictly defined range of concepts and their verbal designations. At the same time, for such restrictions, V.V. Vinogradov emphasized, as if not based in the logical or material nature of the designated objects, actions, efforts. These restrictions are applied to the language of the laws of connection of verbal results. The given equivalents of words are not such, as well as in each of their components’ different meanings.

Building upon Vinogradov’s framework, N.M. Shansky expanded the typology by introducing an additional category – *phraseological expressions*. Phraseological expressions are understood as stable in their composition and use turns that are not only semantically articulated, but also consist entirely of words with free meaning, for example, socialist competition, be afraid of wolves, do not go into the forest, not all that glitters is gold, etc. [Шанский, 1964; 201-202]. Phraseological expressions are only phrases with the literal meaning of the components. Including figurative proverbs in the composition of phraseological expressions is inappropriate, since in this case the composition of phraseological expressions will be as heterogeneous as the composition of phraseological units.



While Shansky's approach emphasizes compositional transparency, A.I. Smirnitsky proposed a classification based on stylistic and semantic criteria, distinguishing between neutral phraseological units and idioms with vivid imagery.

A.I. Smirnitsky [1956] draws a distinction between phraseological units and idioms, defining phraseological units as stylistically neutral expressions that are either devoid of metaphorical meaning or have undergone a semantic shift resulting in the loss of their original figurative character. A.I. Smirnitsky classifies phraseological units as phrases such as *get up*, *fall in love*, etc. Idioms are based on the transfer of meaning, on a metaphor that is clearly recognized by the speaker. Their characteristic feature is a bright stylistic coloring, a departure from the usual neutral style, for example, *take the bull by the horns* - to act decisively; *dead as a doornail* - without signs of life, etc.

N.N. Amosova [1964] distinguishes two types of phraseological units – phrasemes and idioms. Phraseme is a unit of fixed context where the minimum referential requirement needed to actualize the meaning of a given semantically realized word is the only possible one, non-variable (constant), for example, *beef tea* – strong meat broth; *knit one's brows* – to frown; *black frost* – frost without snow, etc. The second component is the indicative minimum for the first. It should be noted that the singular combinability in many phrasemes is extremely unstable and they easily turn into variable combinations of words. [Amosova, 1964; 139]. Idioms, unlike phrasemes, are units of constant context, in which the indicative minimum and the semantically realized element normally constitute an identity and both are represented by the general lexical composition of the phrase. Idioms are characterized by a holistic meaning, for example, *red tape*; *play with fire*, etc.

Summarizing the classifications given, we can conclude that idioms are invariably distinguished as a special type of phraseological units, possessing a number of unique features. Despite the diversity of terminology (for example, “phraseological fusion”, “idiom”), scientists agree that idioms:

– are characterized by a holistic, indivisible meaning that cannot be derived from the sum of the meanings of the components;



– have a high degree of stability and reproducibility;
– demonstrate imagery, metaphor, and stylistic coloring;
– have separately designed components that function as a single semantic whole. Since idioms consistently emerge as a distinct category of phraseological units, it is necessary to examine how leading scholars define this concept in greater detail. Idioms are understood by A. V. Kunin as “stable combinations of lexemes with a fully or partially reinterpreted meaning, with a high proportion of the connotative aspect, that is, its expressive-evaluative, emotive, figurative and other components” [Кунин, 1996; 53].

In the Dictionary of Linguistic Terms by O.S. Akhmanova, “an idiom proper is a phraseological unit that has clearly expressed stylistic features, thanks to which its use introduces an element of play, joke, and pretentiousness into speech”. [Ахманова, 2005; 165-166].

In our opinion, it is also necessary to provide the definition of this term from the Linguistic Encyclopedic Dictionary: idioms are a class of phraseological units that are “semantically related combinations of words and phrases that, unlike similar syntactic structures, are not produced in accordance with the general rules of word choice and combination when organizing a statement, but are reproduced in speech in a fixed relation between the semantic structure and a specific lexical-grammatical composition” [ЛЭС, 1990; 559].

To designate idioms in our understanding, N.F. Alefirenko [2009] uses the term “phraseme”, which implies “a stable combination of words with a holistic and figurative meaning that does not directly follow from the sum of the meanings of its lexical components” (for example, *not to care a straw*) [Алефиренко, 2009; 15]. The author mentions the presence of a number of related terms (phraseologism, phraseological unit, idiom) [Алефиренко, 2009; 17] and indicates their categorical properties: stability, reproducibility, integrity of meaning, separate design, semantic equivalence to the word, impenetrability [Алефиренко, 2009; 24-30].

A.N. Baranov and D.O. Dobrovolsky define idioms as “super-word formations that are characterized by a high degree of idiomaticity and stability” [Баранов, Добровольский, 2013; 69].



L.A. Chinenova considers idioms proper as “a type of separately formed semantically global units in which the meaning of the whole cannot be derived from the sum of the meanings of the constituent components” [ЧИНЕНОВА, 2009; 6].

An idiom, according to N.N. Amosova, is a unit of context in which the demonstrative minimum and the semantically realized element constitute an identity and both are represented by the general lexical composition of the phrase. [АМОСОВА, 1963; 72]. It is also noted that idioms are characterized by a holistic meaning, for example, *dark horse* – a person with a dubious reputation, *mare’s nest* – nonsense, absurdity, *the day after the fair* – too late.

A distinctive feature of idioms proper, according to Professor A.I. Smirnitsky, is their “bright stylistic coloring, emotional richness, departure from the usual neutral style” [СМИРНИЦКИЙ, 1998; 209]. A.I. Smirnitsky’s classification is largely built around the concept of idiomaticity – “the non-derivability of the meaning of an entire linguistic formation from the totality of the meanings of its constituent parts” [СМИРНИЦКИЙ, 1998; 34]. The characteristic features of idioms are the integrity of the nomination and the separate design of the components.

Thus, the concept of “idiom” covers not only stability and metaphoricality, but also emphasizes the semantic indivisibility and expressiveness of the expression, which makes it a key object of analysis in modern phraseology.

An analysis of classifications proposed by leading researchers of phraseology allows us to state that idioms are invariably considered a special type of phraseological units with a number of specific characteristics. Despite the difference in terminology (for example, “phraseological fusion”, “phraseme”, “idiom”, “idiom proper”), most scientists agree that idioms:

- are characterized by a whole, indivisible meaning, not derived from the sum of the meanings of the components;
- have a high degree of stability and reproducibility;
- demonstrate stylistic coloring, imagery and often metaphoricality;
- have separately designed components that function as a single semantic whole.

Thus, idioms stand out against the background of other types of phraseological units as the most semantically integrated and expressive constructions, which

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explains the constant research interest in them both in linguistics in general and within the framework of this study.

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