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SYNTACTICAL AND MORPHOLOGICAL DIVISIBILITY OF SET EXPRESSIONS IN MODERN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

***Анотація.** У статті досліджено актуальну проблему лінгвістики – синтаксичну й морфологічну подільність фразеологізмів у сучасній англійській мові. Проаналізовано основні класифікації фразеологічних одиниць, їх структурну та морфологічну подільність, охарактеризовані риси, що підвищують їх єдність і стабільність. Аргументовано, що стійкі вирази протиставляються вільним фразам та напіввільним комбінаціям.*

***Ключові слова:** фразеологізм, фразеологічна одиниця, стійкий вираз, структурна та морфологічна подільність.*

***Аннотация.** В статье исследована актуальная проблема лингвистики – синтаксическая и морфологическая делимость фразеологизмов в современном английском языке. Проанализированы основные классификации фразеологических единиц, их структурная и морфологическая делимость, и охарактеризованы особенности, повышающие их единство и стабильность. Аргументировано, что Устойчивые выражения противопоставляются свободным фразам и полусвободным комбинациям.*

***Ключевые слова:** фразеологизм, фразеологическая единица, устойчивое выражение, структурная и морфологическая делимость.*

***Annotation.** The article considers the actual linguistic problem, namely syntactical and morphological divisibility of set expressions in modern English. The basic classifications of idioms, their structural and morphological divisibility are analyzed, and the features that enhance their unity and stability are described. Set expressions are contrasted to free phrases and semifixed combinations.*

***Key words:** idiom, phraseological unit, stable expression, structural and morphological divisibility.*

Languages differ greatly in their idiomaticity in the forms they have adopted, the combinative power of words and their lexico-semantic combinability. The actuality of research is very acute. A lot of prominent linguists have been studying English idioms.

Various aspects of idiomatic phrases have been described in a considerable number of investigations by N. Amosova, R. Ginzburg, S. Khidel, I. Krylova, A. Koonin, E. Partridge, E. Radford, N. Rayevskaya and many others. Investigation of English phraseology was initiated by A. Koonin, whose dictionary of English idioms has valuable information in this branch of vocabulary studies. Morphological divisibility is evident when one of the elements (but not the last one as in a compound word) is subjected to morphological change.

The aim of the article is to make an investigation in the field of English phraseology and to look through the features enhancing their unity and stability, their structural and morphological divisibility.

In this article we are going to deal with set-expressions or phraseological units – word-groups consisting of two or more words whose combination is integrated as a unit with a specialized meaning of the whole, such as *not for the world, with half a heart, ups and downs, for love or money, off and on, up to the mark, ships that pass in the night, close at hand, give a green light to, red-letter day, sleep like a log, pull somebody's leg, that's a horse of another colour, can the leopard change his spots? it goes without saying*, and so on. Stability of such word-groups viewed in terms of statistical probability of co-occurrence for the member words has been offered as a reliable criterion helping to distinguish set expressions from free phrases with variable context.

A. V. Koonin gives us such classification of idioms: 1. With one peak (one peak phraseological units, one form word, one notional) *Ex.: to leave for good, by heart*. 2. Phrases with the structure of subordinate or coordinate word combination. *Ex.: a bitter pill to swallow*. 3. Partly predicative (a word + subordinate clause) *Ex.: It was the last straw that broke the camels back*. 4. Verbal with (infinitive, passive) *Ex.: to eat like a wolf*. 5. Phrasal units with a simple or complex sentence structure *Ex.: There is a black sheep in every flock. It was the last straw that broke the camel's back*.

Structural-semantic classification: 1. Nominative (*A hard nut to crack*). 2. Nominative–communicative (*The ice is broken*) 3. Interjectional & modal (*Oh, my eye! (= Oh, my God!)*) 4. Communicative (proverbs, sayings) (*There is no smoke without fire*). 5. Nominative: Substantive: *crocodile tears*; Adjective: *as mad as a hatter, as cool as a cucumber*; Adverbial: *by & by, to & fro*; Verbal: *to live like a lord* [1].

A. V. Koonin shows the possibility of morphological changes in adjectives, forming part of phraseological units: *He's deader than a doornail; it made the night blacker than pitch; The Cantervilles have blue blood, for instance, the bluest in England* [2].

N. N. Amosova gives the following examples: *He played second fiddle to her in his father's heart*. (Galsworthy) *...She disliked playing second fiddle*. (Christie) *To play second fiddle* to occupy a secondary, subordinate position. I

hate skeletons in the cupboard. (lb.) The possibility of a morphological change cannot regularly serve as a distinctive feature because it may take place only in a limited number of set expressions (verbal or nominal).

The question of syntactic ties within a set expression is even more controversial. All the authors agree that set expressions (for the most part) represent one member of the sentence, but opinions differ as to whether this means that there are no syntactical ties within set expressions themselves. Actually the number of words in a sentence is not necessarily equal to the number of its members, which may be proved by the following examples of attributes expressed by group Genitive: *the woman who laced too tightly's name*, or by a quotation group: *(in one of her) Oh-why-did-I-ever-marry-you moods*. Both examples are constituted by two syntactical elements only [3].

The existence of syntactical relations within a set expression can be proved by the possibility of syntactical transformations (however limited) or inversion of elements and the substitution of the variable member, all this without destroying the set expression as such. By a variable element we mean the element of the set expression which is structurally necessary but free to vary lexically. Sometimes the variation is limited as in the case of *to cat a poor figure*. It is usually indicated in dictionaries by indefinite pronouns, often inserted in round brackets: *to make (somebody's) hair stand on end* 'to give the greatest astonishment or fright to another person'; *to sow (one's) wild oats* 'to indulge in dissipation while young'. The word in brackets can be freely substituted: *to make (my, your, her, the reader's) hair stand on end*.

The sequence of constant elements may be broken and some additional words inserted which, splitting the set expression, do not destroy it, but establish syntactical ties with its regular elements. The examples are chiefly limited to verbal expressions, e.g. *The chairman broke the ice-**-*Ice was broken by the chairman; He burnt his boats and ... - > Having burnt his boats he ...* Pronominal substitution is illustrated by the following example: «*Hold your tongue, Lady L.*» – «*Hold yours, my good fool*». (N. Marsh, quoted by N. Amosova) [4].

All these facts are convincing manifestations of syntactical ties within the units in question. Containing the same elements these units can change their morphological form and syntactical structure; they may be called changeable set expressions, as contrasted to stereo-typed or unchangeable set expressions, admitting no change either morphological or syntactical. The examples discussed in the previous paragraph mostly belong to this second type, indivisible and unchangeable; they are nearer to a word than their more flexible counterparts. This opposition is definitely correlated with structural properties. Obviously lexical substitution may be combined with syntactical transformation; compare: *I would never have dared talk to my mother like that*

when I was her age. She'd have knocked me into the middle of next week knocking somebody into the middle of next week (Delaney) [2].

All these examples proving the divisibility and variability of set expressions throw light on the difference between them and words.

Set expressions have their own specific features, which enhance their stability and cohesion. These are their euphonic, imaginative and connotative qualities. It has been often pointed out that many set expressions are distinctly rhythmical, contain alliteration, rhyme, imagery, contrast, are based on puns, etc. These features have always been treated from the point of view of style and expressiveness [5]. Their cementing function is perhaps no less important. All these qualities ensure the strongest possible contact between the elements, give them their peculiar muscular feel, so that in pronouncing something like *stuff and nonsense* the speaker can enjoy some release of pent-up nervous tension [6]. Consider the following sentence: *Tommy would come back to her safe and sound* (O'Flaherty). *Safe and sound* is somehow more reassuring than the synonymous word *uninjured*, which could have been used [7].

These euphonic and connotative qualities also prevent substitution for another purely linguistic, though not semantic, reason – any substitution would destroy the euphonic effect. Consider, for instance, the result of synonymic substitution in the above alliterative pair *safe and sound*. *Secure and uninjured* has the same denotational meaning but sounds so dull and trivial that the phrase may be considered destroyed and one is justified in saying that *safe and sound* admits no substitution.

Rhythmic qualities are characteristic of almost all set expressions. They are especially marked in such pairs as *far and wide*, *far and near* 'many places both near and distant'; *by fits and starts* 'irregularly'; *heart and soul* 'with complete devotion to a cause'. Rhythm is combined with reiteration in the following well-known phrases: *more and more*, *on and on*, *one by one*, *through and through*. Alliteration occurs in many cases: *part and parcel* 'an essential and necessary part'; *with might and main* 'with all one's powers'; *then and there* 'at once and on the spot'. It is interesting to note that alliterative phrases often contain obsolete elements, not used elsewhere. In the above expressions these are *main*, an obsolete synonym to *might*, and *rack*, probably a variant of *wreck*.

As one of the elements becomes obsolete and falls out of the language, demotivation may set in, and this, paradoxical though it may seem, also tends to increase the stability and constancy of a set expression. The process is complicated because the preservation of obsolete elements in set expressions is in its turn assisted by the features mentioned above.

Some more examples of set expressions containing obsolete elements are: *hue and cry* 'a loud clamour about something', a synonymic pair with the obsolete word *hue*; *to leave in the lurch* 'to leave in a helpless position', with the obsolete noun *lurch* meaning 'ambush'; *not a whit* 'not at all', with the obsolete

word *whit* (a variant of *wight* 'creature', 'thing'), not used outside this expression and meaning 'the smallest thing imaginable'.

Rhyme is also used very often: *fair and square* 'honest'; *by hook or by crook* 'by any method, right or wrong' (its elements are not only rhymed but synonymous). *Out and about* 'able to go out' is used about a convalescent person. *High and dry* was originally used about ships, meaning 'out of the water', 'aground'. At present it is mostly used figuratively in several metaphorical meanings: 'isolated', 'left without help', 'out of date'. This capacity of developing an integer (undivided) transferred meaning is one more feature that makes set expressions similar to words [6].

Semantic stylistic features contracting set expressions into units of fixed context are simile, contrast, metaphor and synonymy. For example: *as like as two peas*, *as old as the hills* and *older than the hills* (simile); *from beginning to end*, *for love or money*; *more or less*, *sooner or later* (contrast); *a lame duck*, *to swallow the pill*, *in a nutshell* (metaphor); *by leaps and bounds*, *proud and haughty* (synonymy). A few more combinations of different features in the same phrase are: *as good as gold*, *as pleased as Punch*, *as fit as a fiddle* (alliteration, simile); *now or never*, *to kill or cure* (alliteration and contrast). More rarely there is an intentional pun: *as cross as two sticks* means 'very angry'. This play upon words makes the phrase jocular. The comic effect is created by the absurdity of the combination making use of two different meanings of the word cross adjective and noun [5].

To a linguistically conscious mind most set expressions tend to keep their history. It remains in them as an intrinsic force, and the awareness of their history can yield rewarding pleasure in using or hearing them. Very many examples of metaphors connected with the sea can be quoted: *to be on the rocks*, *to rest on the oars*, *to sail close to the wind*, *smooth sailing*, *to weather the storm*. Those connected with agriculture are no less expressive and therefore easily remembered: *to plough the sand*, *to plough a lonely furrow*, *to reap a rich harvest*, *to thrash* (a subject) *out*.

For all practical purposes the boundary between set expressions and free phrases is vague. The point that is to be kept in mind is that there are also some structural features of a set expression correlated with the invariability the set expression possesses.

There are, of course, other cases when set expressions lose their metaphorical picturesqueness, having preserved some fossilized words and phrases, the meaning of which is no longer correctly understood. For instance, the expression *to buy a pig in a poke* may be still used, although *poke* 'bag' (cf. *pouch*, *pocket*) does not occur in other contexts [3]. Expressions taken from obsolete sports and occupations may survive in their new figurative meaning.

For the results of the article, the memorableness of a set expression, as well as its unity, is assisted by various factors within the expression such as rhythm,

rhyme, alliteration, imagery and even the muscular feeling one gets when pronouncing them. Set expressions are contrasted to free phrases and semifixed combinations. In contrast a free phrase permits substitution of any of its elements without semantic change in the other element or elements.

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