

Anthropocentrism in English and Russian Phraseology

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Abstract

Anthropocentrism has become one of the leading principles in the linguistics at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. According to this principle the man using the language owns it and is the integral part of the language. The research of phraseology with the man in the centre gave rise to the birth of anthropocentric phraseology, i.e. phraseology with the man in the centre. Having shifted the interest of phraseological research toward man was a very important step as man is the creator of the phraseological picture of the world. Somatic idioms, i.e. idioms referring to the parts of the body, are essential to the language and the meaning those parts convey are mostly universal. We also discuss some idioms with somatic elements which have either no equivalent in Russian or in English. We also give an example of a number of idioms of the English language describing people which have no equivalents in Russian. Having been always interested both in the theory and in the practical application of phraseological units in the languages we have decided to dedicate the current article to the modern trends in the phraseological research.

Keywords: anthropocentrism, phraseology, somatic element, idiom, English, Russian, equivalent

Introduction

Anthropocentrism has become one of the leading directions linguistic research has taken at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries. The usage of anthropocentric principle or the principle of ‘the man in the language’ (Benveniste, 1974) takes a special place in linguistics.

According to the principle of anthropocentrism, a person speaking the language can acquire the language in the process of using it as the language ‘has no other objectivity except for the one which is confirmed in the depth of subjectivity’ [Guillaume 1971], i.e. the language becomes subjective while being used. The principle of ‘man in the language’ or anthropocentrism was discussed in the Russian phraseology long ago. I.A. Baudouin de Courtenay in his work ‘Phonology’ (1899) singled out anthropophony as a science concerned with the sound of human speech. The above mentioned principle has a reflection in the works of N.D. Arutunova, A. Vezhbitskaya, U.D. Asperian.

Researchers call this shift in interest toward a man ‘an anthropocentric shift’ in linguistics at the end of the 20th century. (Vorozhbitova 2003).

The research of phraseology on the principle of ‘man in the language’ gave rise to the development of the new direction- anthropocentric phraseology. Nowadays anthropocentric phraseology has undergone a new stage in its development. The aim of anthropocentric phraseology is the research of interaction between linguistic and extralinguistic meanings of phraseologism, or idiom as it is often referred to in an English-speaking world. (Aliferenko 2005)

Man, together with his feelings, needs and interests, is the main reality in the phraseological picture of the world. Not only is the man the centre in the phraseology but also the parts of the body play a great role in the description of the human being by means of idioms.

1. Somatic idioms in English and Russian

Somatic idioms represent a big group in the English language. Somatic idioms are idioms where one of the constituents is the part of the body.

Head, defining one of the most important parts of the body, forms idioms which characterize a person from different angles. Let’s have a look at Russian idioms:

хоть кол на голове теши (lit: even if one breaks a log on the head, idiom describing a stubborn person), непоклонная голова (lit: head that won’t nod, describing a disobedient person), голова пухнет (lit: head swells, describing the state of a person when he doesn’t know what to do) отпетая голова (lit: sworn head, describing a desperate person), горячая голова (lit: hot head describing a hot-tempered person), светлая голова (lit: bright head, describing a clever person) etc.

Let’s have a look at some English idioms having ‘head’ as one of the constituent parts:

bite someone's head off	If you <i>bite someone's head off</i> , you criticize them strongly (and perhaps unfairly).
come to a head	If a problem or difficulty comes to a head, it reaches a point where action has to be taken.
head and shoulders above	To say that one person is head and shoulders above the others means that they are much better than the rest of them.
swelled/swollen head	Someone who has a swelled or swollen head has become proud or conceited, usually because of a recent success. (Learn English today)
a head case	A crazy person
to have rocks in one's head	To be silly or crazy
a big head	A person who believes that he is good at a particular activity
to have a good head for something	To have a mental ability for something

In both languages 'head' in idioms means something important or describes a person in a different way as we have seen on the examples of the Russian language or describes the person's mental ability both in English and Russian.

The word 'heart' is connected with the soul, feelings, kindness, love and sincerity in both nations. We would like to single out that the word 'soul' is used more often in Russian while the word 'heart' is used in English. It may be connected with the national character feature as Russian soul («русская душа»). The examples of those expressions are: One's heart isn't in it - Душа не лежит. (lit: soul doesn't lie there) To pull at someone's heart-strings - Брать кого-либо за душу (lit: to take somebody by the soul), in one's heart of hearts - Во глубине души. (lit: in the depth of one's soul), to have a heart-to- heart talk - Говорить по душам (lit: to speak soul to soul).

We have found some expressions which use different names of the parts of the body while conveying the same meaning.

Behind one's back- За глаза - (lit: behind one's eyes). A very interesting fact is that the meaning 'to be attentive, to be on the alert' is conveyed in Russian by means of the following idiom «держат ухо востро» (lit: to keep one's ear sharp) and in the English language by the idiom- to keep one's eyes peeled.

Phraseological equivalents of the words ' leg' ' feet' (нога) coinciding in both languages:

to feel one's feet (legs) — почувствовать почву под ногами (lit: to feel the soil under one's feet)

find one's legs - встать на ноги (lit: to raise to one's feet)

take to one's feet - уносить ноги; (lit: to take one's feet)

to have one foot in the grave - стоять одной ногой в могиле; (lit: to stand with one foot in the grave)

to set smb. on his feet - поставить кого-л. на ноги; (lit: to raise somebody to his feet)

Some Russian idioms containing the word ' нога' have no equivalents in the English language containing the same word:

вставать с левой ноги (lit: to get up from the left leg)- to get on the wrong side of bed

одна нога здесь, другая там(lit: one leg here, another- there) - quickly (not an idiom in English)

наступать на ногу (lit: to step on somebody's feet)- to hurt somebody

спать без задних ног (lit: to sleep without the hind legs)- to be fast asleep

с какой ноги танцевать (lit: what leg to dance from)- a starting point

нужен как собаке пятая нога(lit: needed as the dog needs the fifth leg)- said about something not needed

Some idioms of the English language containing the word 'leg' with no equivalents in Russian:

'the last leg of the road; to make a leg; to shake a leg; to find one's hind legs; to be as crooked as a dog's hind leg; to have feet of clay; to put one's foot in it; to set something on foot'.¹

¹ Городская открытая научно-практическая конференция Тема: «Анализ употребления слов с семантикой «части тела» во фразеологизмах русского и английского языков» (Open scientific practical conference. Topic: 'Analysis of the usage of words with the semantics ' of the body parts' in idioms of Russian and English''

1.1 Idioms describing a person coinciding in both languages

Some idioms describing a person coincide in both languages:

guinea pig- подопытный кролик

scaregoat- козел отпущения

bookworm- книжный червь

big shot, heavy hitter, bigwig- важная птица

wasn't born yesterday, knows what is what, is nobody's fool- не лыком шит

high flier- птица высокого полёта

the odd man out- пятое колесо в телеге

a square peg in a round hole- пришей кобыле хвост

neither fish nor flesh- ни рыба ни мясо

white-collar worker- белый воротник

blue-collar worker- синий воротник

1.1.1 English idioms describing a person with no equivalents in Russian

The majority idioms describing a person in the English language have no equivalents in Russian; an explanation has to be given instead. Let's have a look at some of these idioms:

alpha-earner- a wife who earns all or most of her household income

arm candy- an extremely beautiful person who accompanies a member of the opposite sex to a party or event, but not romantically involved with that person

alpha girl- the dominant member in a group of girls; a girl who bullies over girls

arm-twister- someone who uses strong persuasion

ambulance chaser- a lawyer who seeks to encourage and profit from the lawsuits of accident victims

brand name-dropper- one who tries to impress others by frequently mentioning the brand names of goods that one owns

baby snatcher, cradle snatcher - old man who marries or courts a much younger woman

clock-watcher -a person who is interested in leaving work and going home

couch potato-a person who likes lazing at home, esp. watching TV

chubby chaser -a person who finds fat people attractive

dirty-collar worker- relating to a corrupt, seedy, or criminal businessperson

dog-collar worker- a priest or other member of the clergy who wears a Roman collar

drugstore cowboy- one who wears cowboy clothes but has had no experience as a cowboy

digital nomad- a person who uses technology, particularly wireless networking, to work without requiring an office or other fixed address

doorer- A driver who opens a car door into the path of an oncoming cyclist.

eye candy- a very attractive person

fly on the wall- an unnoticed observer

fly by night- an unreliable person

grass widow (widower)- a person whose husband (wife) is away for a prolonged time

gatecrasher- an uninvited person at the party

golden boy- somebody who is destined to succeed

green widow- a wife who has to spend all day by herself in her home in the country while her husband goes to work in the town

The analysis has shown that some English anthropocentric idioms are partial equivalents of the ones in the Russian language or have no equivalents at all. Sometimes a partial lexical and semantic coincidence takes place and sometimes a total absence of one.

Conclusion

Phraseology has taken a new direction in its research and development at the beginning of the 21st century, a man-oriented research giving rise to the birth of anthropocentric phraseology. The research will continue in this direction in the future as the researchers have shifted their interest to anthropocentrism in linguistics, i.e, they are concerned with the man in the language.

As we have just seen, the majority of English and Russian idioms connected with the semantics of the parts of the body coincide in meaning as this part of lexis is universally used as we have seen on the examples of the idioms with the constituents 'leg' and 'head' and it isn't connected with the national and historical peculiarities of the nation.

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