

Module I. Lecture 8

Phraseological Units

Plan

1. Phraseology as a subsystem of language
2. Ways of forming phraseological units
3. Semantic classification of phraseological units
4. Structural classification of phraseological units
5. Syntactical classification of phraseological units

1. Phraseology as a subsystem of language

The vocabulary of a language is enriched not only by words but also by phraseological units. Phraseological units are word-groups that cannot be made in the process of speech, they exist in the language as ready-made units. They are compiled in special dictionaries. The same as words phraseological units express a single notion and are used in a sentence as one part of it. American and British lexicographers call such units «idioms».

We can mention such dictionaries as L.Smith «Words and Idioms», V.Collins «A Book of English Idioms» etc. In these dictionaries we can find words, peculiar in their semantics (idiomatic), side by side with word-groups and sentences. In these dictionaries they are arranged, as a rule, into different semantic groups.

Phraseological units can be classified according to the ways they are formed, according to the degree of the motivation of their meaning, according to their structure and according to their part-of-speech meaning.

2. Ways of forming phraseological units

A.V. Koonin classified phraseological units according to the way they are formed. He 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) Most productive in Modern English is the formation of phraseological units by means of transferring the meaning of terminological word-groups, e.g. in cosmic technique we can point out the following phrases: «launching pad» in its terminological meaning is «стартовая площадка», in its transferred meaning - «отправной пункт», «to link up» - «стыковаться, стыковать космические корабли» in its transferred meaning it means «знакомиться»;

b) a large group of phraseological units was formed from free word groups by transforming their meaning, e.g. «granny farm» - «пансионат для престарелых», «Trojan horse» - «компьютерная программа, преднамеренно составленная для повреждения компьютера»;

c) phraseological units can be formed by means of alliteration, e.g. «a sad sack» - «несчастный случай», «culture vulture» - «человек, интересующийся искусством», «fudge and nudge» - «уклончивость».

d) they can be formed by means of expressiveness, especially it is characteristic for forming interjections, e.g. «My aunt!», «Hear, hear!» etc

e) they can be formed by means of distorting a word group, e.g. «odds and ends» was formed from «odd ends»,

f) they can be formed by using archaisms, e.g. «in brown study» means «in gloomy meditation» where both components preserve their archaic meanings,

g) they can be formed by using a sentence in a different sphere of life, e.g. «that cock won't fight» can be used as a free word-group when it is used in sports (cock fighting), it becomes a phraseological unit when it is used in everyday life, because it is used metaphorically,

h) they can be formed when we use some unreal image, e.g. «to have butterflies in the stomach» - «ИСПЫТЫВАТЬ ВОЛНЕНИЕ», «to have green fingers» - «преуспевать как садовод-любитель» etc.

i) they can be formed by using expressions of writers or politicians in everyday life, e.g. «corridors of power» (Snow), «American dream» (Alby) «locust years» (Churchil), «the winds of change» (Mc Millan).

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) analogy, e.g. «Curiosity killed the cat» was transferred into «Care killed the cat»;

d) contrast, e.g. «cold surgery» - «a planned before operation» was formed by contrasting it with «acute surgery», «thin cat» - «a poor person» was formed by contrasting it with «fat cat»;

e) shortening of proverbs or sayings e.g. from the proverb «You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear» by means of clipping the middle of it the phraseological unit «to make a sow's ear» was formed with the meaning «ошибаться».

f) 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 «meche blanche» (French), «corpse d'elite» (French), «sotto voce» (Italian) etc. Phonetic borrowings among phraseological units refer to the bookish style and are not used very often.

3. Semantic classification of phraseological units

Phraseological units can be classified according to the degree of motivation of their meaning. This classification was suggested by acad. V.V. Vinogradov for Russian phraseological units. He pointed out three types of phraseological units:

a) fusions where the degree of motivation is very low, we cannot guess the meaning of the whole from the meanings of its components, they are highly idiomatic and cannot be translated word for word into other languages, e.g. on

Shank's mare - (on foot), at sixes and sevens - (in a mess) etc;
b) unities where the meaning of the whole can be guessed from the meanings of its components, but it is transferred (metaphorical or metonymical), e.g. to play the first fiddle (to be a leader in something), old salt (experienced sailor) etc;
c) collocations where words are combined in their original meaning but their combinations are different in different languages, e.g. cash and carry - (self-service shop), in a big way (in great degree) etc.

4. Structural classification of phraseological units

Prof. A.I. Smirnitsky worked out structural classification of phraseological units, comparing them with words. He points out one-top units which he compares with derived words because derived words have only one root morpheme. He points out two-top units which he compares with compound words because in compound words we usually have two root morphemes. Among one-top units he points out three structural types;

a) units of the type «to give up» (verb + postposition type), e.g. to art up, to back up, to drop out, to nose out, to buy into, to sandwich in etc.;

b) units of the type «to be tired» . Some of these units remind the Passive Voice in their structure but they have different prepositions with them, while in the Passive Voice we can have only prepositions «by» or «with», e.g. to be tired of, to be interested in, to be surprised at etc.

There are also units in this type which remind free word-groups of the type «to be young», e.g. to be akin to, to be aware of etc. The difference between them is that the adjective «young» can be used as an attribute and as a predicative in a sentence, while the nominal component in such units can act only as a predicative. In these units the verb is the grammar centre and the second component is the semantic centre;

c) prepositional- nominal phraseological units. These units are equivalents of unchangeable words: prepositions, conjunctions, adverbs , that is why they have no grammar centre, their semantic centre is the nominal part, e.g. on the doorstep (quite near), on the nose (exactly), in the course of, on the stroke of, in time, on the point of etc. In the course of time such units can become words, e.g. tomorrow, instead etc.

Among two-top units A.I. Smirnitsky points out the following structural types:

a) attributive-nominal such as: a month of Sundays, grey matter, a millstone round one's neck and many others. Units of this type are noun equivalents and can be partly or perfectly idiomatic. In partly idiomatic units (phrasisms) sometimes the first component is idiomatic, e.g. high road, in other cases the second component is idiomatic, e.g. first night. In many cases both components are idiomatic, e.g. red tape, blind alley, bed of nail, shot in the arm and many others.

b) verb-nominal phraseological units, e.g. to read between the lines , to speak BBC, to sweep under the carpet etc. The grammar centre of such units is the verb, the semantic centre in many cases is the nominal component, e.g. to fall in love. In some units the verb is both the grammar and the semantic centre, e.g. not to know

the ropes. These units can be perfectly idiomatic as well, e.g. to burn one's boats, to vote with one's feet, to take to the cleaners' etc. Very close to such units are word-groups of the type to have a glance, to have a smoke. These units are not idiomatic and are treated in grammar as a special syntactical combination, a kind of aspect.

c) phraseological repetitions, such as : now or never, part and parcel , country and western etc. Such units can be built on antonyms, e.g. ups and downs , back and forth; often they are formed by means of alliteration, e.g. cakes and ale, as busy as a bee. Components in repetitions are joined by means of conjunctions. These units are equivalents of adverbs or adjectives and have no grammar centre. They can also be partly or perfectly idiomatic, e.g. cool as a cucumber (partly), bread and butter (perfectly).

Phraseological units the same as compound words can have more than two tops (stems in compound words), e.g. to take a back seat, a peg to hang a thing on, lock, stock and barrel, to be a shadow of one's own self, at one's own sweet will.

5. Syntactical classification of phraseological units

Phraseological units can be classified as parts of speech. This classification was suggested by I.V. Arnold. Here we have the following groups:

a) noun phraseologisms denoting an object, a person, a living being, e.g. bullet train, latchkey child, redbrick university, Green Berets,

b) verb phraseologisms denoting an action, a state, a feeling, e.g. to break the log-jam, to get on somebody's coattails, to be on the beam, to nose out , to make headlines,

c) adjective phraseologisms denoting a quality, e.g. loose as a goose, dull as lead ,

d) adverb phraseological units, such as : with a bump, in the soup, like a dream , like a dog with two tails,

e) preposition phraseological units, e.g. in the course of, on the stroke of ,

f) interjection phraseological units, e.g. «Catch me!», «Well, I never!» etc.

In I.V. Arnold's classification there are also sentence equivalents, proverbs, sayings and quotations, e.g. «The sky is the limit», «What makes him tick», » I am easy». Proverbs are usually metaphorical, e.g. «Too many cooks spoil the broth», while sayings are as a rule non-metaphorical, e.g. «Where there is a will there is a way».

Questions for discussion

1. Give the definition of phraseological units
2. What do they express in a sentence? Give examples
3. How are they classified according to A.V. Koonin?
4. How can they be classified according to the degree of motivation of their meaning?
5. How are they classified according to A.I. Smirnitsky?
6. How are they classified according to I.V. Arnold?

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