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Duk A., Levitskaya M.
English Phraseological Units and Idioms

Belarusian National Technical University
Minsk, Belarus

A word comes to be a powerful means of communication but it can also be a cause of a great misunderstanding if it is not clearly understood by one of the speakers. This is the case with a special layer of language – phraseology – a set of stable expressions with independent meaning. In English and American linguistics no special branch for this exists, and the term “phraseology” has a stylistic meaning. The aim of this paper is to define and classify English idioms, to highlight their origin, and to focus on peculiarities and main problems of translation of phraseological units and idioms

A phraseological unit or an idiom is a phrase or expression, the total meaning of which differs from the meaning of the individual words. For example, *to blow one's top* (*get angry*) and *behind the eight ball* (*in trouble*) are examples of English idioms and it is obvious they cannot be translated literally (word by word). An idiom is a common word or phrase with a culturally presupposed meaning that differs from what its composite words' denotations would suggest. For example, an English speaker would understand the phrase *to kick the bucket* to mean *to die* – as well as to actually *kick a bucket*. Furthermore, they would understand when each meaning is being used in context. Idioms, like slang and swear words, are among the hardest parts of a language because you must be precise and correct, otherwise you might use an idiom that is not adequate for the situation, and sounds rather

awkward or that means something different to your intended use [1].

There exist a considerable number of different classification systems devised by different scholars and based on different principles. The traditional and oldest principle for classifying phraseological units is based on their original content and might be alluded to as "thematic". This approach is widely used in numerous English and American guides to idiom and phrase books. Idioms are classified according to their sources of origin that is to the particular sphere of human activity, life, nature, natural phenomena, etc. We can find groups of idioms associated with domestic and wild animals and birds, agriculture and cooking.

There are also numerous idioms drawn from sports, arts, and other types of activity. This principle of classification is sometimes called "etymological". For example, word-groups associated with the sea and the lives 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 just some of them: *to be all at sea* – to be unable to understand; *to sink or swim* – to fail or succeed; *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; *to sail under false colours* – to pretend to be what one is not; *half seas over* – drunk.

According to the degree of idiomatic meaning of various groups of phraseological units, they can be classified as follows:

1) *phraseological fusions* – units the meaning of which cannot be deduced from the meanings of their component parts: *to come a cropper* – to come to disaster; *neck and crop* –

entirely, altogether; *at sixes and sevens* – in confusion or in disagreement;

2) *phraseological unities* – expressions the meaning of which can be deduced from the meaning of their components: *to show one's teeth* – to be unfriendly; *to sit on the fence* – in discussion, politics, etc. refrain from committing oneself to either side; *to lose one's head* – to be at a loss what to do; *to lose one's heart to smb.* – to fall in love; *a big bug* – a person of importance;

3) *phraseological collocations (combinations)* – traditional word-groups: *meet the demand, meet the necessity, to be good at something, to be a good hand at something, to have a bite, to take something for granted, to stick to one's word, gospel truth, bosom friends, to break news* [2].

Secondary ways of forming phraseological units are on the basis of another phraseological unit:

- *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*;

- *analogy*, e.g. *Curiosity killed the cat* was transferred into *Care killed the cat*;

- *contrast*, *thin cat* – «*a poor person*» was formed by contrasting it with *fat cat*;

- *shortening of proverbs or sayings*, e.g. the phraseological unit *to make a sow's ear* with the meaning «*ошибаться*» 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*;

- *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*).

We can see how phraseological units are formed. For example, the class of phraseological units describing human appearance can be divided into several subclasses, according to the object which is described.

- Facial features, beauty: *face like thunder*– somebody looks very angry; *face like a wet week-end*– they look sad and miserable; *face only a mother could love*– someone is ugly or unattractive; *face that would stop a clock* – has a shockingly unattractive face; *poker face* – an expressionless face that shows no emotion or reaction at all.

- Eyes: *eyes like saucers* – eyes opened widely as in amazement; *eyes flash fire* – somebody looks at someone angrily

- Nose: *nose to light candles at* – red nose.

Sometimes, idioms can be created by individuals, generally, famous people, and, then, they gain worldwide popularity: Benjamin Franklin – *Time is money*; Washington Irving – *the almighty dollar*; Fennimore Cupper – *go on the warpath*; Jack London – *the call of the wild*.

One can also single out the following two groups of phraseological units:

- 1) primordial English phraseological units: on top of the world; in seventh heaven; old hand; all ears;
- 2) phraseological units adopted from foreign languages or American English: *nest egg*, *buzzing*.

Idioms are integral part of any language; they make our speech more colourful and authentic. Without phraseological expressions our speech would be considered poor. So, if we want to improve our speech we need to know and understand phraseological units [3].

In this paper we have discussed how idioms can be used in English. We have focused on different types of phraseological units according to various classifications, and provided a number of examples. Thus, being based on practical

and theoretical research we have come to the conclusion that idioms are figurative expressions which do not mean what they literally state.

References:

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2. English idiomatic expressions / Warrell A.J. – M.: Fiction. – 2003. – P. 96.
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