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New Meaning of Russian Phraseological Units in Journalism

The study deals with the problem of new semantic components of Russian phraseological units in the context of modern journalistic papers. These components manifest themselves especially in modern political articles. The existing phraseological dictionaries do not reflect them, and this fact presents us with actual task of creating a special new phraseological dictionary based on today's usage of the phraseological units.

We pay attention to the units with an invective (abusing) component which are quite a popular stylistic device in modern journalism. It helps the authors to describe clearly and vividly someone's actions, real or imagined offenses or crimes, as well as to express the author's attitude to the events.

Such journalistic utterances often become the object of debate and sorting out relationships: whether it was legitimate to use this or that saying in relation to the actions of a public figure or a popular personality [5, p. 225–226]. In this case the exact definition of the phraseological unit should be clear [4, p. 384], and all the connotations should be taken into account. This problem becomes especially sharp when we face the task of linguistic examination, in which we need to find out whether there was a personal insult by a figurative expression.

As an example, we have analysed several phraseological units with a potentially abusive meaning. Their traditional definitions have been taken from the popular phraseological dictionaries of Russian literary language of V.N. Teliya [9], A.I. Molotkov [10], A.N. Tikhonov [11].

By analyzing the usage of this phraseology in modern media we have found out new actual meanings not mentioned in the traditional dictionaries. On this base we attempt to create a modernized definition which reflects real features of the figurative expression usage.

Let us have a look at the examples of the appearance of the positive values of a potentially abusive phrase.

Belmo v glazu – “thorn in the eye”. Traditionally, this figurative expression was considered as disapproving: it is a hindrance, something burdensome, irritating with its presence [10, p. 35]: “thorn in the eye of Russian secret services” [7]. But in modern media it often indicates someone who resists violations in the society by his just actions: “I have sent dozens of letters to the Interior Ministry, to the General Prosecutor... So I was like a thorn in their eyes” [6].

Such usage takes place quite often, so in the new definition we should say that “thorn in the eye” is someone disturbing criminal activity.

The same we can see about the expression “*lozhka dyogtya v bochke myoda*” (a spoon of tar in the barrel of honey) or “fly in the ointment”. Traditionally, it is associated with a minor nuisance [9]. But in modern journalism is often shows a positive fact: “into the huge barrel of artificial honey a significant spoon of the election campaign tar has been thrown” [2]; “however, the spoon of tar in the barrel of fanfars is not clearly noticed, though the production and management success of Mikhail Kubatov is exaggerated” [8].

The “honey” in these contexts is not at all “something good”, but the “spoon of tar” is something which is aimed at revealing the truth to people. So we define this unit as “to reveal (detect) the unpleasant details of someone's violations”.

In these two analysed examples the potentially invective expressions have acquired positive connotations. In the next one we face the fact that a positive phrase becomes negative.

“The prodigal son” in the traditional dictionaries [10, 11] is a “repentant sinner”. In modern media, though, this phrase indicates a person who left the motherland for reasons of personal profit, but returned to it, eager to get some privilege or benefit [1, 3]. We see that a previously neutral idiom now has an injective (accusatory) component.

So, the modern definition of an idiom should be designed on the base of its usage in the modern journalism. In this case it reflects the peculiarities and connotations of this phrase, which corresponds to the tasks of our legal-linguistic phrasebook.

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