


STRUCTURAL PATTERNS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS USED TO DENOTE  
THE PERSONAL CHARACTER

I.K. Kobyakova, Candidate of Philology, Full Professor  
S.V. Baranova, Candidate of Philology, Associate Professor  
V.A. Matuzka, Student  
Sumy State University, Ukraine

The paper deals with the phraseological units denoting the personal character in English. Special attention is paid to substantive word groups. Their structural patterns are distinguished, variations in composition and meaning are analysed.

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The language habits and behaviour of a person have been investigated by linguistics and the theory of communication for the last two decades [1]. The emotional state [3; 4] and manners of interaction [5] have been in the focus of attention. Another aspect is represented by the means of verbalizing the traits of the human character.

Each language has its own peculiarities in phonetics, grammar, lexicology and phraseology [2]. The substantive idioms that denote personality traits are the subject matter of this paper. Substantive phraseological units are word groups that are functionally associated with a noun, i.e. word groups with a headword expressed by a noun.

The following subgroups among substantive phraseological units semantically oriented to the character of the person are distinguished:

1. The subgroup with the structural pattern Adjective + Noun and attributive relations between the components: *a tough customer, yellow dog*.

*And remember, I don't want a fortunate thing for this – only a good price. There are a lot of tame cats who mightn't follow the new man around (Cronin A.J. «The Citadel»).*

In this example the man who can be easily influenced by someone else is mentioned.

The subgroup characterized by the constant and variable dependence of components. In English there are such lexical variants:

- a) interchangeable nouns: *easy game (mark, pray)*;
- b) interchangeable adjectives: *good (clear) conscience*;

*...talking of the dead with a regretful cheerfulness, relating old examples of his character, smiling at them with a good conscience: and when the day of the funeral came round, doing the honors with exact propriety (Stevenson R.L. «Master of Ballantrae»).*

*... watched it, as was fit, the while he worked; ate it at the fit hour; was in all things served and waited on; and could take his hire in the end with a clear conscience, telling himself the mystery was performed duly, the beards rightfully braided, and we (in spite of ourselves) correctly served (Stevenson R.L. «In the South Seas»).*

Interchange of adjectives *good/clear* meaning the *integrity/conscience* can be traced in the sentences.

Among grammatical variants of the substantive phraseological units there is replacement of an attribute expressed by a noun in the Genitive Case by a prepositional noun attribute, for example: *a stony heart – a heart of stone; iron will – a will of iron*. There are several cases with proper names as a head word in English: *a smart Aleck, a gay Lothario*.

In the idioms adjectives in different degrees of comparison can be found. This phenomenon is typical of the English language: *the older Adam, the worst mixer*.

- *It's nice not to be dependent on them.*

- *The worst mixer in the world. But you, I should have thought (Galsworthy J. «Flowering Wilderness»).*

The example uses the superlative degree of comparison of the adjective *bad* to point to an unsociable person. On the basis of the idiom *a bad mixer* we get a new one – *the worst mixer*.

It is a prepositive attributive type with the adjoinment that is characteristic of English. There are two subgroups within it:

1) adjective-nominal in which an adjunct is expressed by a qualitative adjective without morphological markers (*yellow dog*);

2) numeral-nominal (*second fiddle*).

In English contextual extension of the adjective takes place, that does not concern the whole substantive phraseological unit but its headword. In the following example the occasional extension is combined with the formation of a sustained metaphor.

*All things therefore seemed to point to this: that I was slowly losing hold of my original and better self, and becoming slowly incorporated with my second and worse (Stevenson R.L. «The strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde»).*

2. The subgroup with the structural pattern Noun + Noun. In this combination the second component can be extended by a prepositive adjective or noun in the Genitive Case (*the girl next door*).

The combination Noun (Pronoun) + own + Noun is also typical of English:

*If I play my card well, I can get some old woman to me back and go into management. One's got to be one's own master. That's the only way to make a packet (Maugham W. S. «Theatre»).*

In this example the phraseological unit *one's own master* means the independence of an individual. Substantive phraseological units of the English language are characterized by a prepositive attributive type of adjoinment to a substantive-nominal group. About 50 % of the substantive phraseological units of this structural subgroup that

are semantically oriented to the human nature are combinations with a proper name, functioning as a headword and a dependent component: *Jack Homer; a Miss Nancy*. Accordingly, in this subgroup substantive phraseological units with the constant dependence of components are prevalent. The proper names as constituents of an idiom are a specific feature of English substantive phraseological units.

*But it was delicious sin, and she did not deny her eyes. In vain Mrs. Grundy admonished her. The pagan in her, original sin, and all nature urged on her* (London J. «The Game»).

The proper name *Mrs. Grundy* refers to a person from the point of view of the generally accepted norms of decency.

3. The subgroup Noun + preposition + Noun. The English substantive phraseological units are characterized by an attributive prepositional type with postposition and adjoinment. In some cases there is extension of the second noun through an adjective or noun in the Genitive Case (*wolf in sheep's clothing, knight in shining armour*).

*She took my hand and led me to the foot of the hummock: "Here's your knight in shining armour"* (Fowles J. «The Magus»).

This example describes the so-called prince on a white horse denoting the image of a guy in girl's dreams.

There may be a change in the number form of the first component both from singular to plural, and vice versa (*baby in the wood – children in the wood, pests of society – pest of society*).

*...And just look what he called me, a heartless scoundrel – me, the best – hearted man, what ever lived – a pest of society and a danger to the public* (Maugham W. S. «The Round Dozen»).

*A pest of society* shows such feature of the character as human sponging.

English is characterized by the use of such prepositions as *of, in, about, at, on* in the units under investigation.

When the preposition *of* is used, a head word is an object or phenomenon that has attributive or attributive-objective relations to the adjunct. Most of the substantive phraseological units are motivated. Among the analyzed substantive phraseological units the

following subtypes can be distinguished:

a) with ahead word referring to the person that has the quality denoted by an adjunct: *a gentleman of fortune, child of nature*.

*She felt that he wanted her to be a child of nature. That suited her very well* (Maugham W. S. «Theatre»).

This idiom nominates a playful, extremely friendly and quite mischievous person;

b) with a head word denoting a feature, characterising a person or an object expressed by the adjunct: *presence of mind*.

*She was indeed so taken aback that she had not the presence of mind to deny it* (Maugham W. S. «Theatre»).

This example shows the ability of an individual to remain calm, and take quick and reasonable actions;

c) with a head word expressing the whole thing, an adjunct – a part of the whole: *the baby of the family*;

d) with a head word designating an object, the adjunct – its content: *the ball of fire, bowels of mercy, bundle of nerves*.

*At least it would be a face worth seeing: the face of a man who was without bowels of mercy: a face but which had to show itself to raise up in the mind of the unimpressionable Enfield, a spirit of enduring hatred* (Stevenson R.L. «The strange case»).

This idiom emphasizes such personal feature as the capacity for mercy.

When the preposition *in* is used a head noun denotes an object that is in attributive-spatial relations to an adjunct. In this subgroup there are several subtypes:

a) with a head word denoting the person or thing that are limited by a place or space designated by an adjunct: *cat in pan, the man in the street*.

*I shall always be grateful to Albert because he keeps me in contact with the man in the street.* (Maugham W.S. «The Creative Impulse»);

b) with a head word naming an action; an adjunct – the place of this action being performed: *fire in the blood*. Other prepositions are rarely used: *about* (*man about town, hair about heel*), *on* (*Johnny on the spot*), *at* (*the man at the wheel*).

*He never attempted to play, anyone but he himself specialized in men about*

*town, gentlemanly gamblers, gold and young scamps with a good side to them* (Maugham W.S. «Theatre»).

The example indicates the popularity of a man who is constantly in the spotlight, fashionable identity.

4. The subgroup Noun + and +Noun.

This subtype is characterized by coordinate connection and constant dependence of components in the majority of cases. Morphological invariability is inherent in most coordinate substantive phraseological units. Two-member units of the English language semantically oriented to the person's character can have both components in the singular (*David and Jonathan*) or in the plural (*stocks and stones*) forms.

Among the substantive phraseological units semantically oriented to the personality traits this structural pattern is commoner in the English language. Sometimes in English one can observe variation of the preposition, e.g. *a stick or a stone – a stick and a stone*.

*Insidiously, and by remote ways, as well as by the power of stick and stone and clout of hand, were the shackles of White Fang's bondage being riveted upon him* (London J. «White Fang»).

*"Why couldn't you leave me alone?"*

*"Hang it all, I'm not a stick or a stone"* (Maugham W.S. «The Painted Veil»).

5. The subgroup Participle I (II) + Noun.


English substantive phraseological units belong to a participial-nominal group of a prepositive attributive type with adjoinment (*rolling stone, broken reed*).

*To Caroline's extreme annoyance, she has not been able to find out anything about him, except that he is a foreigner. The Intelligence Corps has proved a broken reed* (Christie A. «The Murder of Roger Ackroyd»).





The phraseological unit *a broken reed* indicates such feature of human nature as unreliability. Thus, we have found a number of characteristic features in the structural organization of the substantive phraseological units to describe the human nature in the English language. The commonest structural pattern is the combination Adjective + Noun. The

less frequent patterns are Noun + preposition + Noun, and Participle I(II) + Noun. English is also characterized by the use of proper names as constituents of the units under investigation.


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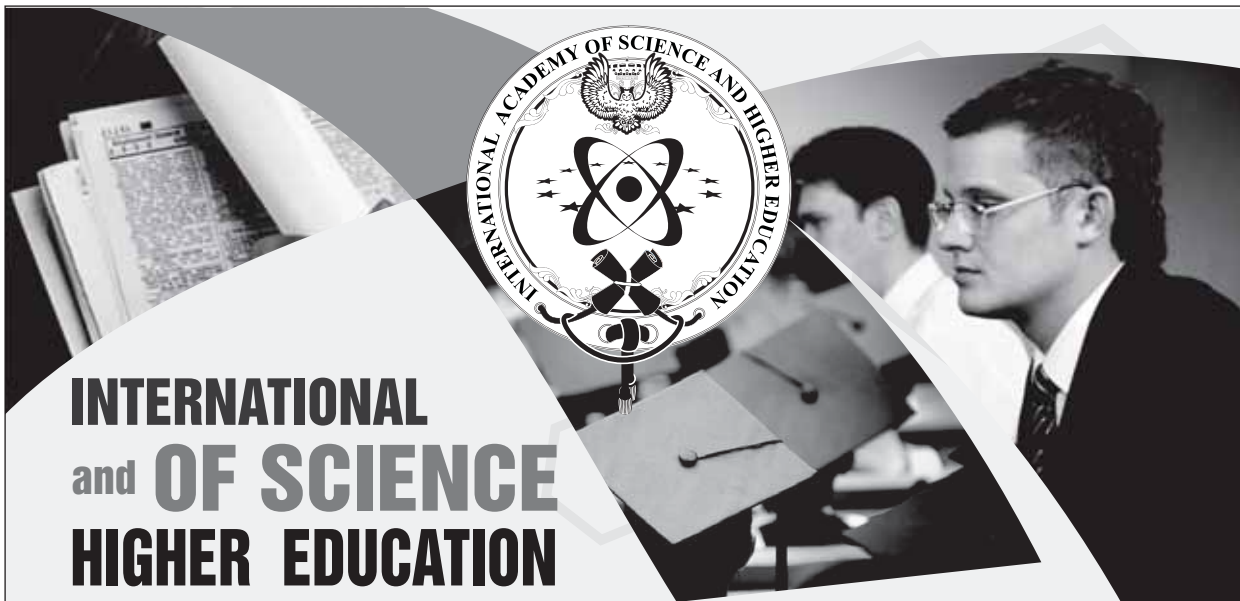
#### Information about authors:

1. Iryna Kobyakova - Candidate of Philology, Full Professor, Sumy State

University; address: Ukraine, Sumy city; e-mail: [kobyakova@ukr.net](mailto:kobyakova@ukr.net)


2. Svetlana Baranova – Candidate of Philology, Associate Professor, Sumy State University; address: Ukraine, Sumy city; e-mail: [svitlanabaranova@gmail.com](mailto:svitlanabaranova@gmail.com)


3. Vita Matuzka – Student, Sumy State University; address: Ukraine, Sumy city; e-mail: [kobyakova@ukr.net](mailto:kobyakova@ukr.net)




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