

Artículo de investigación

## National-cultural specificity of semantics of phraseological units, relating to the semantic field "idleness" in the english and russian languages

Especificidad nacional-cultural de la semántica de unidades fraseológicas, relacionadas con el campo semántico "ociosidad" en los idiomas inglés y ruso

Especificidade nacional-cultural da semântica de unidades fraseológicas, relativas ao campo semântico "ociosidade" nas línguas inglesa e russa

Recibido: 20 de abril de 2018. Aceptado: 10 de mayo de 2018

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### Abstract

National-cultural specificity of semantics of phraseological units (PU), characterizing the labor activity, in the English and Russian languages, has its special and actual significance in perceiving the depths of national consciousness. This research is devoted to the identification and comparative description of the semantic field of the PU type being investigated and the image-motivational aspects of the PU meaning. The universal and unique traits in the semantics of the PU of both languages are studied, the cultural connotation is defined and described through the cultural interpretation mechanism of all the content components of the studied PU.

Cultural connotation, being an interpretation of the components of the PU meaning in the categories of culture, is layered into the connotation as a linguistic concept. Each component of the PU connotation is able to provide additional information of a national cultural character. First of all, such components of the connotation are the emotive and evaluative macrocomponents of the PU semantics.

**Keywords:** image, idioms, English, Russian, semantics, field

### Resumen

La especificidad nacional-cultural de la semántica de unidades fraseológicas (PU), que caracteriza la actividad laboral, en los idiomas inglés y ruso, tiene su significado especial y real para percibir las profundidades de la conciencia nacional. Esta investigación está dedicada a la identificación y descripción comparativa del campo semántico del tipo de PU que se está investigando y los aspectos de imagen-motivación del significado de la PU. Se estudian los rasgos universales y únicos en la semántica de la PU de ambas lenguas, la connotación cultural se define y describe a través del mecanismo de interpretación cultural de todos los componentes de contenido de la PU estudiada. La connotación cultural, al ser una interpretación de los componentes del significado de la PU en las categorías de la cultura, se superpone a la connotación como un concepto lingüístico. Cada componente de la connotación PU puede proporcionar información adicional de un personaje cultural nacional. En primer lugar, tales componentes de la connotación son los macrocomponentes emotivos y evaluativos de la semántica de la PU.

**Palabras clave:** imagen, modismos, inglés, ruso, semántica, campo.

## Resumo

Especificidade nacional-cultural de semântica de unidades fraseológicas (PU), o que caracteriza o local de trabalho, em Inglês e Russo, tem seu especial real e perceber as profundezas da consciência nacional significado. Esta pesquisa dedica-se à identificação e descrição comparativa do campo semântico do tipo de UP que está sendo investigado e dos aspectos de motivação da imagem do significado de UP. As características únicas e universais na semântica da UP de ambas as línguas são estudadas, a conotação cultural é definida e descrita através do mecanismo de interpretação cultural de todos os componentes do conteúdo da UP estudada.

A conotação cultural, sendo uma interpretação dos componentes do significado de UP nas categorias de cultura, é sobreposta à conotação como conceito linguístico. Cada componente da conotação PU pode fornecer informações adicionais de caráter cultural nacional. Em primeiro lugar, tais componentes da conotação são os macrocomponentes emotivos e avaliativos da semântica da PU.

**Palavras-chave:** imagem, expressões idiomáticas, inglês, russo, semântica, campo

## Introduction

The relevance of this study is due to the need of studying the phraseological units, that make up the worldview of the people, its mentality. PU not only reflect the reality and express the attitude of the speakers of a certain language to various fragments of the world, but from generation to generation they also reproduce the cultural and national attitudes and traditions of the people – the native speaker. A more thorough study of the language phraseological composition is possible only when studying its individual Microsystems in unrelated languages. Comparative study allowed the scholars to exceed the bounds of unrelated languages and research multi-structural languages in science of language of our country and foreign linguistics (Husnutdinov, 2016). Therefore, as a study, we selected the PU group, characterizing the labor activity in English and Russian. Firstly, this is due to the concept of "labor" being an integral part of the linguistic and cultural consciousness of a particular people; secondly, the studied PU occupy a significant stratum in the phraseological composition of both languages, which is largely explained by the causes of extra-linguistic order: the significant role being played by labor in the life of a man and a human society; thirdly, the phraseology is developing in the anthropological channel of modern linguistics (Vorobyov, 1997; Kosharnaya, 1999; Maslova, 2012; Murzin, 1997 Teliya, 1996 etc.); fourthly, the existing works devoted to the analysis of the PU, characterizing the labor activity, either do not investigate phraseological material in a comparative aspect, or describe any aspect of the labor process.

The description of the language material with the help of semantic fields has long occupied the minds of many scientists (Ufimtseva, 1961; Karaulov, 1981 and others), but so far in linguistics there has been no generally accepted concept of "the field."

## Materials and Methods

### Methods of study

Data has been collected by using the following groups of research methods: comparative-typological analysis, component analysis, inductive analysis.

### Semantic analysis of PU, referring to the semantic field "Idleness"

On the basis of the criteria, the PU, characterizing labor activity in English and Russian, were grouped into the following semantic microfields: "Industriousness", "Idleness", "Mastery, skills, experience and their absence", "Quality of labor activity", which reflect the universal nature of structuring reality by human thinking. Each microfield is further subdivided into semantic groups, which allows us to more concretize the ideas about the national and cultural peculiarities of the PU of these languages.

PU, characterizing labor activity of the semantic field "Idleness" in the English and Russian languages, can be grouped into two field centers: "Active Idleness" and "Passive Idleness".

For PU related to the semantic field "Idleness",

the basic metaphor is "to idle - to be engaged in a meaningless affair", which is a stereotyped antipode of cultural attitudes, embodied in the form of biblical sayings, worldview judgments: *to work like a horse; he that will not work shall not eat; без труда меду не едят (one should deserve honey by labor)*.

Having analyzed the PU of the semantic field "Idleness" in English and Russian, we came to the conclusion that in both cultures "active" idleness has nothing to do with work, is condemned and contrasted with hard physical labor that produces visible results, being the norm developed in the society: *plow the sand, fish in the air; носить воду решетом, трубить в кулак (to do nothing fruitful or useful)*.

Let's compare the image of an "active" idler that manifests itself in the Russian material in a light, empty, senseless, aimless and sometimes absurd activity: *в носу ковырять, груши околачивать (to do senseless, unnecessary work)*, to the image of an English idler of the "active" type, who works for visibility: *to flog a dead horse*.

In English culture physical and mental labor is not opposed to each other, but in Russian culture spiritual, mental activity according to the norm - hard physical labor, the peasant labor, the grain grower's labor, the tiller's labor - was not considered a true labor occupation.

In the space of "active" idleness, we included the group of PU, reflecting the speech activity of the subject. It is noted in the PU of the studied languages, that working people extremely disapproved of those who were engaged in empty, pointless chatter and empty talk, wasting their energy in vain: *the greatest talkers the least doers, beat the air; болтать языком, точить лясы, басни расправлять (to gossip, to talk nonsense)*. Silent people are valued in both cultures.

A lazy idler appears as one, living a life in the spirit of "empty chatter and gossip." In the PU of the English language, idleness crosses with fun: *all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy*. In Russian culture, there is often crossing between the concepts of "idleness" and "rest", "ease", conditioned by their mediation in cultural knowledge: *праздные речи, праздное время, ленивому всегда праздник (to search any reason for idleness in speech, time, holidays)*.

This way of life, reflected in the phraseological units of the studied languages through the images of an active but meaningless and unfruitful action, causes a negative attitude, mediated by the system of representations that guide the native speaker in perceiving the studied PU.

PU accumulate the most important values for the people. On the basis of our material, it can be concluded that in Russian culture a workman humbly endures the hardships and deprivations of labor life. In the PU of the English language, we did not note such a trait in the workman.

The PU of the English language emphasize the desire of the English to fight for their rights, while suspending their work in protest: *lay down tools, hang fire*. The origin of such PU can be explained by the fact that England was the birthplace of the industrial revolution, and labor conflicts were not uncommon in various industries, where a person must unconditionally obey the rhythm of the machines.

In both cultures, the image of a rich idler is traced. An English aristocrat, even devoting lot of time and energy to his work, prefers to look like a lazy idler in public. According to the PU, the English idler can spend a lot of time, watching TV, lazily lounging on the couch: *a couch potato* - "a slugabed". In some ways, this image is similar to the image of I.I. Oblomov, personifying laziness in the Russian cultural thought and symbolizing the Russian life of a certain part of society. The idle way of life of the gentleman, the landlord for whom the peasants and servants work, was legalized in the understanding of the people.

In the English and Russian microfield "Idleness" the description of the "passive" type occurs through the description of the posture taken by the subject with the goal of doing nothing, equivalent to not moving of the subject in space, condemned in the context of idleness as a violation of established ethical norms. The basis of figurative rethinking here are combinations of words, in which attention is focused on the external manifestation of an idle state. Most often this is a static state: *sit on one's hands, lie (or rest) on one's oars (or the oars); лежать/сидеть на печи, сидеть богородицей, на солнышке загорать (to sit and do nothing)*.

In the space of the "passive" idleness in the studied languages, one can include PU with an

explicit refusal of an activity or PU with negation: *not to do a hand's turn*, *not to start a peg*, *палец не шевельнуть (не пошевелить)*, *не сделать (и) (лишнего) шагу (not to move)*. The peculiarity of the PU motivation is manifested in the fact that such free combinations of words, which denote an insignificant action requiring minimum effort, are exposed to the process of metaphorical rethinking. Such nature of the motivation greatly increases the expressive and emotional-evaluative potential of these PU. Refusal of work, demonstrated by the subject's posture, organizing the image-motivational basis of the PU internal form, is perceived as a behavioral act being explicable at the level of lexicographic labels that characterize the emotive evaluation of the PU.

PU, related to the semantic group "Passive idleness" according to one of its meanings, can be regarded for another seme: refusal to provide assistance. It is noted in the PU that for Russians help ("to help") is a moral obligation. The English are more egocentric and consider that "help" is first of all help to oneself. If the overwhelming majority praised the labor, the not working elements hated it: *Работа не волк – в лес не убежит. (Work will never escape from you)*. The English make a connection between an idler and evil forces: *idle men are the devil's playfellows*.

The English "passive" idler *like a bump on a log* - like a stump, like a blockhead, also describes a slacker - a sloth; cf. in the PU of the Russian language: *как пень, как бревно, как колода (like an unmovable lifeless object)*. Here, in addition to the seme "idleness" is the seme "stupidity", being the basic one, that indicates the intersection of these concepts in the Russian worldview.

In the PU of both languages there are warnings about the danger of idleness: *idleness makes the wit rust*; *Станешь лениваться, будешь с сумой волочиться, Кто ленив сохой, тому весь год плохой (The negative result of laziness will come very soon)*. It should be emphasized that in Russia, there was a severe struggle with idlers and lazy people, not only among peasants, but also among workers. A striking example of this is the Petrine order of 1706 to the Tula public blacksmiths. The order resolutely suppresses such vices and provides cruel punishments against them.

The given above PU contain cultural settings,

which guide the native speaker when perceiving PU. The image of the PU is interpreted in the cultural knowledge of native speakers, formed on the basis of having the idea of a norm with regard to work, therefore all the PU of the semantic field "Idleness" can be characterized as follows: to evade labor and avoid work.

## Results

According to the conducted study, we can make the following conclusions:

1. PU, characterizing the labor activity of a person, occupy one of the important places in the phraseological system of modern English and Russian languages, because it deals with labor, which is the basis of life and human activity.
2. The percentage of the PU in the studied macrofields of the English and Russian languages is almost the same. The sequence of selecting the fields in the macrofield of LA is subordinated to their semantic-quantitative composition.
3. Semantics of the majority of PU, characterizing labor activity, has a vivid evaluative, qualifying nature.
4. The PU with a negative emotional evaluation are the most numerous in the composition of the PU type being investigated. This is explained by the fact that a negative evaluation usually has a more expressive character in the language.
5. The evaluative and emotive macrocomponent of the compared PU meaning was formed in its content during the process of correlating linguistic and cultural semantics and being due to the wide cultural background on which the image of the PU was perceived.

## Discussion

In the life of a human, mutual connection of language and culture is beyond doubt.

The language is a component of culture, the most important means of its formation and preservation. Every person perceives the surrounding environment through the prism of notions (Sharafutdinova, 2017). Units of the language, and especially PU, represent "the most valuable source of information about the culture and mentality of the people" (Maslova, 2001), and semantic and structural-semantic links of words reflect actual for a human relationships between objects and phenomena of the reality, its real and ideal objects and, thus, convey the peculiarities of the national worldview, giving

models of the worldview to the individual (Shendeleva, 1999).

In this regard, the structural and semantic relations of words, as lexical nests, semantic fields, should be considered not only as linguistic, but also as linguocultural phenomena. In this study, the central place is occupied by the field structure of the language, which is based on many semantic fields representing interrelated and multilevel language constructs of the language. That is, the semantic field is considered as a set of units, united by certain characteristics. Cultural components can be included in the content of idioms either directly - they can include words containing in their meanings cultural semes (carry coals to Newcastle, лезть на рожон, ехать в Тулу со своим самоваром), and indirectly - in a number of cases the culturally significant information contained in the PU can be revealed only on a fairly representative multitude of semantic fields. It is on the background of such semantic groups that basic metaphors are established, being correlated with cultural attitudes. The basic metaphor acts as an intermediary between the linguistic and cultural competence of native speakers.

Semantic fields are related by the principle of hierarchy and subordination. On the one hand, the PU can be collected into larger associations - macrofields, and on the other hand - they can be included in the internal structure of the fields of less numerous units - microfields. The microfields, in their turn, can include lexico-semantic groups and subgroups.

In our material, in order to carry out a comparative analysis of the cultural connotations of the semantic macrofield "Labor Activity" (hereinafter referred to as LA), it is necessary to carry out a step-by-step examination of the fields composing the macrofield under investigation in English and Russian. PU, characterizing labor activity, in the languages being studied, were grouped in the following semantic microfields: "Industriousness" (36.2% in English and 46.1% in Russian), "Idleness" (25.3% in English and 32.0% in Russian), "Skill, mastership, experience and their absence" (21.6% in English and 14.3% in Russian), "Quality of labor activity" (16.9% in English and 7.3% in Russian), which reflect the universal nature of structuring reality by human thinking. Each microfield is further subdivided into semantic groups, which allows us to more

concretize the ideas about the national and cultural peculiarities of the PU of these languages.

Proceeding from the foregoing, we have presented a set of criteria that determine the understanding of the national and cultural specifics of the PU, characterizing labor activity in both languages:

1. Correlation of the image of each PU type being investigated with a common for them "basic" metaphor, which "holds" the entire semantic field.
2. Interpretation of the components of PU meaning in the categories of culture through the medium of semantic fields.
3. Perception of the image both in its literal reading, and in the metaphorical perception of meaning.
4. Investigation of the material culture and mentality of the English and Russian peoples manifested in the PU.
5. Interpretation of the PU figurative foundation in the mirror of the national culture of the English and Russian language communities.

### Conclusions

The conducted research allowed us to reveal the general and the specific in the phraseological units, characterizing labor activity of two distantly related languages - English and Russian. Phraseological units, characterizing labor activity of a person occupy a special place in the phraseological composition of English and Russian linguocultures, which is largely explained by the causes of the extralinguistic order: the significant role being played by labor in the life of a man and a human society. Comparing phraseological units of the English and Russian languages also allowed us to draw a number of conclusions, which, as it seems to us, can make a definite contribution to the study of the national and cultural specifics of the phraseology of various languages.

### Acknowledgements

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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