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SOME METHODS OF FINDING KEY COMPONENTS
IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN PROVERBS

The report is devoted to the problem of finding the so-called "key components" in some English proverbs and their Russian proverbial counterparts. Previously the research was made by some American, Latvian and Russian linguists concerning the role of key component(s) in idioms and the methods of distinguishing such a component (components). It was found out that key components are the explicit image-bearing components, as they play the key role in bringing to mind the meaning of the whole idiom supported by a wider context. These components remain in the focus, they create a symbolic representation of the idiom and help the reader or listener to make explicit the missing component(s) and retrieve the base form of it.

The research will be based on the data obtained from the Internet resources (British and Russian corpora) and from the experiment with native speakers of the English and Russian languages. The experiment will involve different types of modifications of proverbs, the most important of which includes substitution, deletion (or ellipsis), and phraseological allusion.

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One of he main problems of studying the contextual (or, using another terminology) discoursal behaviour of phraseological units is the problem of finding out their key component or key components.

The researches conducted by American linguists R.Gibbs, N.Nayak, J.Bolton, M.Keppel and D.Beitel at the end of the XX century demonstrated that the metaphors on which phraseological units are based are still alive for native speakers and are a prominent part of their everyday conceptual system (Gibbs 1994; Gibbs 1990; Gibbs 1989; Gibbs 1989). This conception of phraseological units also explains, why the majority of them are lexically flexible and can be easily transformed. In their article published in 1989 R.Gibbs, N.Nayak, J.Bolton and M.Keppel stated that any idiom (they used the term idiom) could be lexically changed in a creative manner and it would still be understood "if there is sufficient pragmatic context" (Gibbs 1989). The scholars also stated *the role of some components* in the whole phraseological meaning.

The first attempt to single out such a component/components was made by C.Cacciari and P.Tabossi in 1998 (Cacciari 1998). They proved that in most idioms it is possible to single out the components (component), which are more relevant for detecting the meaning of an idiom, than the other constituents. Without them the comprehension of an idiom would be impossible. The experiments demonstrated that the idiom could be identified only after the "key" had been accessed by the reader or listener.

In the book "Idioms and Idiomaticity" Fernando Chitra also stresses the role of such key component/components and considers it logical, that whenever the speaker deforms an idiom, he preserved its "key" word, and the reader is able to

understand the deformed phrase, because he knows the metaphorical meaning of this word, which is obtained being part of an idiom or a number of idioms (Chitra 1996). The author continues that the role of the "key" word is so important, that we may even presume that it conveys the main part of the meaning of the corresponding idiom, whereas other components give additional information. For example, the meaning of the whole phraseological unit "to dangle a carrot before the donkey" can be derived from only one key component "carrot" in the following quotations:

Thatcher waves trade **carrot** (headline);

The Prime Minister has offered some very appealing political **carrots** in his economic program.

So the reader or listener perceives the idiom not as a "dead metaphor", but an expression with a quite transparent figurative meaning.

In her two books "Phraseological Units in Discourse: towards Applied Stylistics" published in 2001, and ""Stylistic Use of Phraseological Units in Discourse" published in 2010, Anita Naciscione speaks about "image-bearing component/components" and their role in bringing to mind the meaning of the whole phraseological unit while analyzing one of the most sophisticated patterns of instantial stylistic use of phraseology – phraseological allusion (Naciscione 2001; Naciscione 2010). She is sure that "Understanding phraseological allusion relies on building a mental model of the PU, which is hinted at on the meaning of explicit image-bearing constituents, which are semantically and stylistically loaded…. Allusion is achieved if one or more constituents bring to mind the complete semantic and stylistic information of the PU. For purposes of identification, it is important to keep the base form at he back of one's mind throughout the stretch of phraseological allusion" (Naciscione 2010:108-109).

One of the most interesting examples presented by A.Naciscione to show that a PU can be retrieved from even a single key component (she calls it constituent) is the example with the proverb "a cat has nine lives" from G.B.Shaw's "Back to Methuselah":

Burge-Lubin: But damn it, man – I beg your pardon, Archbishop, but really, really –

Archbishop: Don't mention it. What were you going to say?

Burge-Lubin: Well, you were drowned four times over. You are not a **cat**, you know.

The presence of the image-bearing constituent *cat* acts as a recall cue in the face of the absence of the full form. … the anaphoric tie *you were drowned four times* over together with the negation *you are not a cat* help to retrieve the missing constituents, writes A.Naciscione (Naciscione 2010: 114).

In her report "Phraseological Units in Computer-Mediated Discourse" at the International conference of phraseologists in Slovenia in 2005 O.Petrova from Finland proposed the theory of "componential inequality" and presented an interesting approach how to single out key components. Using the hypothesis of hierarchal inequality and gradation of PU lexical components and applying quantitative analysis of such transformations of phraseological units as ellipsis (or deletion) and substitution, the author considers 300 cases of contextual use of the Finnish phraseological unit "heitää helmiä sioille" (to cast pearls before swine). The use of special computer program helped her to single out both key components and he components, which could undergo deletion and substitution.

One of the parts of the Candidate dissertation of Aisylu Abdullina "Contextual Transformations of Phraseological Units in the English and Russian Languages" defended in 2007 was also devoted to the problem of finding out key component/components while applying different contextual transformations (Абдуллина 2007). The material was selected from Russian and British corpuses ([www. ruscorpora.ru], [www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk], [http:sara.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/lookup.html], two English phraseological units "to have smth at one's fingertips", "to fish in troubled waters" and their Russian phraseological counterparts– "знать как свои пять пальцев", "ловить рыбу в мутной воде" were under analysis. It was found out that the most frequently used types of phraseological units' transformations were substitution of one or more

components and deletion. These two types of transformations were also found to be the most appropriate ones in singling out the key components. The results showed the coincidence of key components (which can be also called semantic centers) in two languages ("in troubled waters" and "в мутной воде", and "at one's fingertips" and "как свои пять пальцев").

So we see that two most "important" types of transformations of phraseological units in the process of finding out their key components are substitution (or replacement) of one or more components (which only give additional information) and deletion (in other terms ellipsis, elision, contraction, or complicated deformation). In our research (the first step) we use the experimental method of informants. Fifty students from Kazan (Volga region) federal university, Russia, whose major is English (so, they are not native speakers) were asked to apply different types of contextual use of several English proverbs: addition of one or more components, substitution, permutation, deletion, extended metaphor, phraseological pun, cleft use, phraseological reiteration and phraseological saturation of discourse. The following English proverbs were chosen:

1. If the mountain does not come to Mahomet, then Mahomet must go to the mountain;
2. All roads lead to Rome;
3. If you run after two hares, you will catch none;
4. Walls have ears;
5. The game is not worth the candle;
6. Never put off tomorrow what you can do today;
7. There is no smoke without fire;
8. Of two evils choose the less.

Let's present the most interesting results.

It was found out that multi-word proverbs permit more transformations that proverbs consisting of less components. It was also proved that substitution and deletion (which leads to phraseological allusion from the point of view of mental

processes) are the most powerful means in the process of establishing key component/components.

If the mountain does not come to Mahomet, then Mahomet must go to the mountain

Substitution:

1. **If the** *cliff* **does not come to Mahomet, then Mahomet must go to the** *cliff*.
2. **If the** *hill* **does not come to Mahomet, then Mahomet** *goes* **to the** *hill*.
3. **If the** *rock* **does not come to Mahomet, then Mahomet must go to the** *rock*.
4. **If the mountain does not come to** *me*, **then** *I go* **to the mountain**.
5. **If the mountain does not come to Mahomet, then Mahomet must** *climb* **the mountain**.

Deletion:

1. Is he so stupid and does not understand that **the mountain** won't **come to Mahomet**?
2. It's no use waiting for him. **The mountain** won't **come.**
3. It's high time for you **to go to the mountain** if you really want to solve the problem.
4. You should go there and arrange everything. You know **Mahomet must go to the mountain**, and not vice versa.
5. I will reach my destination, *I will* **go to** *my* **mountain** and nothing can prevent me from doing it! (+ substitution and addition)
6. Don't be like **Mahomet**, John, you should apologize first, don't wait till **the mountain comes to** *you*. (+ substitution)
7. You are not **the mountain**, you know, you are **Mahomet**, so if you need to solve the problem, apply to them.
8. – Oh, my God, what're you doing here? Have you already spoken with the boss?

– Not yet. I am in two minds…

– Then who are you waiting for? For **Mahomet**?

– No. I'm not **the mountain**. (+ phraseological saturation of the discourse)

9. I feel like **Mahomet** with you! I know that you are guilty but it's better for me to be on good terms with you. (+ phraseological saturation of the discourse)

10. Don't be so proud! The world is full of **Mahomet***s* like you.

So, one type of transformation - substitution doesn't permit us to find the key components. Only substitution with deletion (and its last step phraseological allusion) helps us to find the key component "Mahomet".

There is no smoke without fire

Substitution:

1. **There** *can't be* **smoke without fire**.
2. **There is no** *ash* **without fire**.
3. **There is no smoke without** *reason*.
4. **No smoke** *appears* **without fire**. (+ permutation)
5. *Where* **there is smoke,** *there is* **fire** (+ permutation)**.**
6. **There is no smoke** *if there is* **no fire**. (+ permutation)
7. **There is no** *enmity* **without** *quarrel*.

Deletion:

1. **No smoke without fire**? Are you sure?
2. He didn't believe in **smoke without fire**.
3. Their strange behaviour is a sign that something has got wrong with them. It's **smoke**, and I am going to search for the **fire**.

The above presented examples give us two key components "smoke" and "fire".

Walls have ears

Substitution:

1. **Walls** *with* **ears**.
2. **Walls** *with* **ears** listen to us.
3. – I'd like to tell you something.

- Please, not here! There're **walls** *with* **ears** everywhere. Let's go to a safer place.

4. *All trees* **have ears**. *All houses* **have ears**. (+ addition)

Deletion:

1. Don't you understand that there are **ears** everywhere? Don't risk your life again.

2. Even of you are sure that you are alone, be sure that there are a lot of **ears** even in your own house.

It's possible to say that the component "ears" is the image-bearing component, and the implicit components "walls" and " have" are supported by the wider presented contexts. The importance of the key component "ears" as the image-bearing one is also proven if we take into consideration two more phraseological units: "to be all ears" and "keep one's ears open"

Of two evils choose the less

Substitution:

1. **Of two** *problems* **choose the less**.
2. **Of two** *catastrophes* **choose the less.**
3. **Of two** *bad things* **choose the less**.
4. **Of two evils** *select* **the less**.
5. **Of two evils** *take* **the less**.
6. **Of two evils choose** *one that will allow you to eat your cake and have it*. (+ phraseological saturation of the discourse)

Deletion:

1. And then I understood that that was the time when I had **to choose of two evils**. (+ permutation)

2. − Are you going **to choose** *now* **of two evils**?
   - Oh, daddy! If only **of two evils**! (+ phraseological reiteration, permutation and addition)

3. − The situation is very difficult. What are you going to do?
   - **To choose of two evils**, of course. (+ permutation)

4. She hesitated between **two evils**, without knowing what to do, who to apply to.

5. He didn't know which **of two evils** he would *prefer*: both of them could bring him a lot of harm. (+ substitution and permutation)

The above presented examples make it possible to consider "of two evils" and even "two evils" in case of sufficient context, the key components of the proverb "of two evils choose the less".

The perspectives of the research is seen in adding the Russian phraseological counterparts of the presented English proverbs, in comparing the results and using the material from corpuses.

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