

ON THE ISSUE OF MATCHING A PHRASEOLOGICAL UNIT WITH A WORD (COMPARATIVE PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS VERSUS ADJECTIVES)

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Abstract

The authors of the article consider adjectival comparative phraseological units (ACPhU) and the corresponding compound adjectives. The purpose of the article is to provide analysis of the structural, syntactic, and the semantic features of ACPhU and compound adjectives and their combinability. The study shows that there are discrepancies among these linguistic phenomena at the structural, syntactic and the semantic levels. Compound adjectives are characterized by structural uniformity; they differ in the order of their components. Both the first and the second components of the compound adjectives have a higher valency than the corresponding ACPhU components. The latter allow intrusion of separate words between the components, i.e. they are structurally separable units, whereas the wholeness of the compound adjectives does not allow morphological-grammar changes of the components. It is demonstrated in the article that ACPhU are firstly combined with nouns and pronouns characterizing a person in general, whereas compound adjectives are combined with nouns characterizing a person's parts of the body and everything else related to him, what that person demonstrates an attitude to.

ACPhU allow wedging of some words between the components, i.e. they are structurally separable formations. The first component of ACPhU may be used in a comparative degree, the second component – in a plural form. Compound adjectives are inseparable formations, that is they do not allow wedging of any elements between the components, they are characterized by hyphenated spelling, and sometimes – inseparable or separable spelling. So, when studying ACPhU and compound adjectives, it is more reasonable to speak about their correlation rather than equivalence.

Keywords: language, translation, Russian, English, phraseology, adjectival, comparative phraseological units, compound adjectives

1. INTRODUCTION

In the functional-semantic aspect phraseology remains understudied. Ph.U may demonstrate various perceptions of the universe, helping to understand national stereotypes of behavior, mentality, cultural experiences, customs, values and beliefs of society representatives (Andreyeva, 2020; Sakhbullina, 2019;

Gimadeeva, 2019).

“Everything is learned through comparison” – ancient philosophers used to say, and therefore, perhaps, various concepts become surrounded with complexes of set comparisons, designed to reveal some meanings in bright forms, acting on our imagination. For example, an idea of being unnecessary in the Russian language is conveyed by such an expression as “needed as a fifth wheel for a carriage”, and the concept of strength – by such one as “strong as a bear” (Gavrin, 1973).

In adjectival phraseological units it is usually the adjective (in its short form) that takes the role of the specifier, and as a comparative component – a noun in the nominative case takes place: *гол как сокол* (rus: naked as a falcon, engl: ever spare and ever bare, he has not a stitch to his back); *трезв как стёклышко* (rus: sober as a glass, engl: sober as a judge); *беден как церковная мышь* (rus. and engl.: poor as a church mouse).

Comparison by degree belongs to the next type of adjectival phraseology, when a typical meaning is conveyed by establishing a relationship between the two semes according to the degree of the feature or phenomenon, where one seme has a greater or lesser degree, than another, for example: *чернее тучи* (rus: blacker than a cloud, engl: morose); *легче пёрышка (пуха)* (rus: lighter than a feather (fluff); *проще пареной репы* (rus: simpler than a stewed turnip, engl: as easy as falling off a log, it's a cakewalk); *дороже золота* (rus: more expensive than gold, or the dearest). With the comparative component, an attribute tautological or synonymous with the prop word may stand out, for example: *белее снега белого* (whiter than the white snow), *чернее ночи пасмурной* (blacker than the dark night), *выше облака ходячего* (higher than the floating cloud).

The last type of phraseological units tends to lose the third component and correspond to the paired type of formations, like: *тише воды, ниже травы* (rus: quieter than water, lower than grass; engl: keep a low profile, meek as a lamb). Structurally, a Ph.U is formed in the process of speech practice of native speakers on the basis of analogy law, which is when the formation happens not randomly, but on the ground of certain language mechanisms (Gavrin, 1973).

Just like in many European languages, there is observed a simultaneous existence of compound adjectives in English with the following structure: noun stem + adjective stem, for instance: *snow-white*, and of adjectival comparative phraseological units, conveying their meaning with the same stems of adjective and noun, for example: *as white as snow*. To compare there are examples from the Russian language: *белый, как снег – белоснежный* (white, like snow – snow-white).

When considering the issue on the equivalency of a Ph.U with a word, the wholeness of that word is taken into account, applicable to only an English word. In the Russian language, for example, a normative wedging of morphemes into the composition of a word is observed. In contrast with words, adjectival Ph.U of the English language allow for occasional wedging of elements compatible with one of the components of the Ph.U: “*Darling, it's as plain as the nose on your beautiful face.*” (W.S. Maugham, *The Hour before the Dawn*, ch.II). The following adjectives composing compound words are not used in adjectival comparisons: *merry* (*merry-faced, merry-making*), *old* (*old-fashioned, old-maidish*), *plain* (*plain-spoken*) and others.

Compound words, in contrast to the corresponding adjectival comparative Ph.U (ACPHU) of the English language, are used both in preposition to the defined word and in postposition. As Sidyakova notes, the juxtaposition of these two linguistic phenomena in structural, syntactic and semantic relationships gives some additional material for solving the issue on equivalency of a phraseological unit to a word (Sidyakova, 1967, p. 20).

The question of the correlation between a Ph.U and a word has always raised various opinions of linguists. Some scholars keep to the idea that the equivalence of a Ph.U to a word is of limited and relative nature, while others insist that Ph.U are full equivalents of words, identical to them (Amosova, 1963; Ivannikova, 1964).

2. METHODS

We conducted the research on the material of English and American fiction literature of XX-XXI centuries. The number of the found compound adjectives like *snow-white* type consisted of 311 units and 222 ACPHU. Methods of semantic analysis alongside with translation and comparison for distinguishing the linguistic means were implemented. The sampling method was used during the work with English and Russian

dictionaries and the National Language Corpora to collect the samples.

Descriptive method, analysis of lexicographical interpretations of Russian and English Ph.U and adjectives; the method of component analysis to study the structure of the language phenomena; the method of conceptual and interpretative analysis were utilized.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Structural Features of ACPHU and Compound Adjectives

Both in ACPHU and in the compound adjectives two necessary elements are used: an adjective or its stem and a noun or its stem. The difference in the use of these components is in their order of following each other. An adjective is always the first element of ACPHU, and the noun stem – of the compound word. We will try to clarify what the differences are of these two language phenomena and if they are equivalents to each other.

ACPHU mostly have a structure: *as+adjective+as+noun*, though there are cases when a noun is used together with an adjective, or it is followed by a whole sentence, or a gerund is used in its place:

as poor as a church mouse; as fast as one's legs would carry one; as easy as falling off a log.

Among 222 ACPHU in our study, there were about 44 such cases, which constituent approximately 20%. The structure of compound adjectives is more stable. In our sample of 222 ACPHU, there are mostly adjectives and a slightly larger number of nouns or other secondary components. According to Sidyakova (Sidyakova, 1967, p.22), both the first and second components of ACPHU (only as parts of Ph.U) are characterized by low valency. The adjectives *black*, *still* and *easy* are of the highest valency in our sample:

as black as midnight, as still as a stone, as easy as ABC,

as black as crow's wing, as still as a mouse, as easy as breathing,

as black as thunder, as still as a post, (as falling or rolling off a log),

as black as ink; as still as death; (as kiss my or your hand, as lying, as shelling peas or as winking; also. easy as pie, easy as damn it; easy as apple-pie or as tea-drinking).

The valency of nouns is twice lower.

In our sample, there is a variety of the first components alongside with uniformity of the second component in compound adjectives. The second components of compound adjectives are distinguished by a high valency. The following words have a very high valency: white, red, green, blue.

white: china-white,	blue: baby-blue,	red: blood-red,
cream-white,	ice-blue,	brick-red;
dove-white,	night-blue,	green: grass-green,
ivory-white,	peacock-blue,	light-green,
lily-white,	sapphire-blue,	olive-green,
porcelain-white,	sea-blue,	emerald-green.
snow-white,	slate-blue,	
veal-white;	steel-blue;	

The valency of noun stems as the second components of compound adjectives is significantly lower.

Compound adjectives are mainly written with a hyphen, for instance *coal-black*, *snow-white*, *sea-green*, though there are cases of separate and joined-up writing. The difference in spelling may be caused by a syntactic position in a sentence. Compound adjectives as parts of prepositive attributes tend to be spelled with a hyphen, while after the defined word a separate type of spelling is observed.

There are also variants of morphological nature: *ice-cold* and *icy-cold*, *snow-white* and *snowy-white*. The morphological variants of such type are not inherent to ACPHU. The first components of ACPHU may be used only in a comparative degree, and the second components – in singular and plural forms. Still the

variation of ACPHU is manifested in omission of the first conjunction: *as black as a coal* and *black as a coal*.

3.2. Syntactic Features of ACPHU and Compound Adjectives

Compound adjectives and adjectival phraseological units have, mostly, similar syntactic functions. The ability of compound adjectives to substantivize is their syntactic feature. Compound adjectives are used in the functions of a subject or an object, which normally characterizes a noun. In the function of a subject, a compound adjective may look like this: *Sea-green* suits you, Dinny: you ought to be married in it (J.Galsworthy, Flowering Wilderness, ch. V). In the function of a prepositional object: ... and now the throng was of a different complexion – girls in mauve and *cream-white* and *salmon-pink* and *silver-grey*. (Th. Dreiser, the Financier, ch. XVII).

The functions of a predicative of a compound nominal predicate and of a postpositive attribute are inherent to ACPHU. Compound adjectives are usually used in the function of a simple prepositive attribute or a predicative adjective.

In the function of a simple prepositive attribute: The churchyard was *brick-hard* clay (H/Lee, To Kill a Mocking-Bird, p.II, ch.XII).

In the function of a predicative adjective: The fame of this battle was by now becoming *world-wide* (Th. Dreiser, The Titan, ch. LIX). ACPHU in preposition acquires a hyphenated spelling and turns into a compound word: ...evolution was a *dry-as-dust* theory (J/London, Martin Eden, ch.XIII).

Compound adjectives are not used in the function of a detached attribute (Sidyakova, 1967, p.26).

3.3. Combinability of ACPHU and Compound Adjectives

ACPHU and compound adjectives have different denotations. ACPHU characterize a person, combining with nouns and personal pronouns, for example: Mary would be all right now, *right as rain* (A.J. Cronin, The Citadel, Bk. IV, ch. XIX). I'm feeling *as good as gold*, thank you (K.S. Prichard, The Roaring Nineties, ch. XXXIX).

A human body parts are described by ACPHU, for example: hair: *as black as a crow's wing*; face: *as hard as a stone*, *as red as fire*; heart: *as heavy as lead*, *as soft as butter*; body: *(as) fat as an alderman*;

A human's temper: *(as) nervous as a cat*; *(as) cold as charity*; *(as) tame as a chicken*; *(as) chirpy (or lively) as a cricket*; *(as) cool as a cucumber*; *(as) open as the day*; *(as) straight as a die*.

Articles associated with a person's activity are described by the following ACPHU: a steamer: *as old as the hills*; letter: *as clear as a bell*.

Abstract ideas: immensity: *as still as death*; clarity: *(as) clear as day (daylight, rarely noonday)*, *(as) clear as crystal*.

Natural phenomena, sea: *as smooth as glass*; moon: *as bright as day*.

In the following examples, we will consider compound adjectives in combinability in the following semantic groups:

Human: Doctor Medley...was unhappily almost *stone deaf* (A.J. Cronin, The Citadel, Bk. II, ch. VIII). A *thread-thin* old man,...was holding out his hands to Elmer...(S.Lewis, Elmer Gantry, ch. III, 3).

Human body parts: they characterize eyes, lips, mouth, hair, beard, moustache, and so on. Adjectives, characterizing "eyes" and "hair" are distinguished by a special variety:

eyes: *night-blue*, *state-blue*, *steel-blue*, *ice-green*; hair: *iron-grey*, *slate-grey*, *steel-grey*, *doe-soft*.

Articles related to human activities: two groups associated with clothes and dwellings, not inherent to ACPHU, are emphasized:

apron: *snow-white*; dress: *sea-green*; *silver-grey*; *cream-white*; clothes: *ivory-white*; overcoat: *navy-blue*; suit: *bottle-green*, *steel-grey*; door: *peacock-blue*; *peacock-green*; chair: *stone-hard*; bed: *slate-blue*; carpet: *sapphire-blue*, *turkey-red*; curtains: *blood-red*; cottage: *silver-grey*.

Abstract ideas: *boy-hood*: *rose-white*; fame: *world-wide*; problem: *world-old*; notions: *age-old*. Nature phenomena:

sky: <i>blood-red</i> ,	stars: <i>diamond bright</i> ,
<i>iron-grey</i> ,	cloud: <i>steel-blue</i> ,
<i>ice-blue</i> ,	earth: <i>iron-grey</i> ,
<i>gold-bright</i> ,	air: <i>crystal clear</i> ,
<i>copper-green</i> ;	water: <i>rust-red</i> .

Thus, ACPHU, first of all, are combined with nouns and pronouns characterizing a human in general (Andreyeva, 2019). Compound adjectives are combined with nouns, characterizing human body parts and everything related to him/her.

3.4. Semantic Features of ACPHU and Compound Adjectives

The main meaning of ACPHU is in the meaning of the adjective. The second component of ACPHU has an intensifying function. The central meaning of the compound adjective is also found in the adjective stem. The first component just clarifies the meaning of the second one in a compound adjective, providing a qualitative evaluation. So, the markings, which are characteristic of a noun, serve as the basis for comparison in compound adjectives. We will cite several such adjectives in English as an example, where the first component is preserved:

steel-strong,	ice-smooth,
steel-true	ice-cold,
steel-blue	ice-green
steel-grey	ice-blue (Sidyakova, 1967, p.30).

For comparison, usually one of the characteristic features inherent to the subject is used. To add an intensifying undertone, the noun is stressed, as well. To emphasize a high degree of the “cold” feature, the word “ice” is used: *ice-cold*. To strengthen the “dark” feature, the word “pitch” is used: *pitch dark*.

In English, there is prevalence of the use of various noun stems along with the same adjective stem. So, for example, multiple tinges of red color are differentiated, if necessary, by nouns placed before the word “red”:

cherry-(blood-, brick-, fire-, flame-, flesh-, robin-, rose-) red.

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In modern English, ACPHU and the corresponding compound adjectives coexist. But there are significant divergences between these two language phenomena at the structural, syntactic and semantic levels. Compound adjectives are characterized by uniformity in their structure; differ in the order of the sequence of the components.

The first and second components of compound adjectives have a higher valency, than the corresponding ACPHU components.

ACPHU are characterized by a separate spelling. Among the two linking words involved in the formation of ACPHU the first one is optional. ACPHU allow wedging of some words between the components, i.e. they are structurally separable formations. The first component of ACPHU may be used in a comparative degree, the second component – in a plural form. Compound adjectives are inseparable formations, that is they do not allow wedging of any elements between the components, they are characterized by hyphenated spelling, and sometimes – inseparable or separable spelling. The wholeness of compound adjectives does not allow morphology-grammatical changes of the components.

ACPHU in a sentence usually acts in the function of a predicative, or as a postpositive attribute. Compound adjectives, in the majority of cases, function as prepositive attributes, and more rarely – in the function of predicatives. ACPHU in preposition turns into a compound word.

ACPHU generally characterize a person himself, and compound adjectives –everything associated with him/her, and what they show their attitude to. When studying ACPHU and compound adjectives, it is more reasonable to speak about their correlation rather than equivalence.

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