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Perception of verbal communication reflected in Russian and English phraseology: towards a new theory of phraseologism- formation

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Abstract

The study aims to analyze a particular group of Russian and English phraseologisms that describe different aspects of verbal communication and detect what kind of perceptual sensations underlie the creation of their images. Hence, this paper describes the empirical findings that may validate the role of perceptual experience in the process of phraseologism-formation and give an insight into differences in the choice of perceptual cues in phraseologism-formation and, thus, into the peculiarities of perceptual cues processing in different cultures. The results obtained contribute to the development of a new theoretical perspective for explaining the process of idiom-formation.

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1. Introducing the problem and setting the goals

My research is devoted to one of the key problems in the field of phraseology that can be termed “cognitive mechanisms of the phraseological meaning construal”. This problem is considered in my work from a particular perspective, i.e. from the point of view of perception as an integrated part of man’s cognitive activity. The present paper addresses, in particular, two major issues: how different aspects of verbal communication are perceived in two

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cultures (Russian and English) and how this perception of verbal communication is reflected in the images of Russian and English phraseologisms.

To begin with, I would like to consider two English phraseologisms:

(1) *sweet talk* – ‘flattery, cajolery’;

(2) *to throw light on something* – ‘help to explain (something) by providing further information about it’.

As we can see, both phraseologisms refer to verbal communication as they describe certain verbal acts – (1) coaxing someone and (2) explaining something. The examination of their figurative meanings shows that in the first phraseologism verbal communication is perceived as something having the pleasant taste characteristic of sugar or honey; whereas in the second phraseologism verbal communication is perceived as a process of making something abstract (like facts, information, thoughts, etc.) visible. Proceeding from this, we can say that the images underlying the meanings of these English idioms reflect the gustatory and visual perception of verbal communication, correspondingly.

The main goals of my research are as follows:

- to detect what kind of perceptual experience is reflected in the images of Russian and English phraseologisms from the word-field of verbal communication;
- to systematize the phraseologisms in question according to the perceptual sensations that provide the construction of their images;
- (resting on the results obtained) to clarify the role of perception in the phraseological meaning construal.

2. The phraseological material under analysis

The study involves Russian and English phraseologisms that denote verbal communication in a very broad sense, including its various types and aspects, different ways and medium used to transfer information as well as special characteristics or speech behavior of communicants (both speakers and listeners), for instance:

ходить вокруг да около (lit. *to go around and nearby*) – ‘to speak in a roundabout way; avoid expressing something directly’;

масло масляное (lit. *butter is buttery or oil is oily*) – ‘the repetition of something already said in different words without clarifying anything’;

(не) бросать слова на ветер (lit. *(not) to throw words on the wind*) – ‘(not) to speak without thinking, (not) to make hasty promises that will not be fulfilled’;

to deep into a book – ‘read parts of a book, but not all’;

fast talker – ‘someone who can talk in a clever way in order to persuade people to do or believe something, often something that is not honest or not true’;

a slip of the tongue – ‘something that you say by accident when you intended to say something else’.

The total amount of the phraseologisms under analysis is about 3 thousand items. They have been extracted from well-known contemporary Russian and English phraseological as well as monolingual explanatory and bilingual (translation) dictionaries that offer a broad collection of Russian phraseologisms and English (British and American) idioms that are in current use nowadays, for example:

Frazeologicheskiy slovar' russkogo yazyka / (ed.) A.I. Molotkov (2001);

Russkaya frazeologiya. Slovar'-spravochnik / R.I. Yarantsev (2001);

Frazeologicheskiy slovar' russkogo literaturnogo yazyka / A.I. Fedorov (2001);

Frazeologizmy v russkoy rechi. Slovar' / A.M. Melerovich, V.M. Mokienko (2005);

Bol'shoy frazeologicheskiy slovar' russkogo yazyka / (chief ed.) V.N. Teliya (2006);

The Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms / K. Maxwell et al. (1999);

The Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms / A.P. Cowie, R. Mackin, I.R. McGaig (2002);

The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms / C. Ammer (2003);

The Cambridge Idioms Dictionary (2006);

Thesaurus of English Idioms / L. Nagy (2006);

The Oxford Dictionary of English (2010);

Russian-English Dictionary of Idioms / S. Lubensky (2013).

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