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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### CONSISTENT PATTERNS OF SEMANTIC VARIATION OF ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGISMS IN CONTEXT

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#### Abstract

The article deals with general consistent patterns and variation conditions of the meaning of English phraseological units of verbal and substantive types in context. As the result, some potential and maximal possibilities of semantic variation of verbal and substantive phraseologisms - idioms of the modern English language were revealed, and some conditions of contextual variation of phraseological units in usual and occasional use have been discovered as well. The research dwells on comparison of zones of constant and variable semantic features of English phraseological units. As the result, some interrelation between semantic variation of phraseologisms in context and theme - rheme meaningful decomposition of utterance and thematic blocks in English dialogical speech have been disclosed.

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#### Introduction:-

##### Materials and Methods:-

A broad differentiation of problems in phraseological science has been noticed up-to-date. It can be conceptual analysis of phraseological units [PhU]; linguocultural, semantic, stylistic aspects; comparative research of PhU, study of grammatical peculiarities of phraseologisms, etymological analysis, study of derivational features of phraseologisms of certain languages. The study of phraseologisms is followed by usage of new methods, appearance of new aspects of research of PhU and general problems of phraseological theory are discussed.

In modern anglistics we can watch the problems of phraseology as a system, with detailed analysis of synonymy, antonymy, homonymy, polysemy, etc. In phraseology, problems of nominative character, reconsideration of meaning and identity of PhU embrace specifics of phraseologism and its semantic nature. Semantic problem of phraseological units attracts many scientists as A.V. Kunin, N.G. Rahmatullaeva, E.V. Rijkina, O.V. TSherbana, A.M. Bushuy, etc.

N.G. Rahmatullaeva analyzes analogy in the phraseological system in its demonstration in structural and semantic peculiarities of PhU. The researcher considers occasional phraseological nomination to be able to become the beginning of secondary phraseologisation.

O.V. TSherbana investigates semantic degradation as a tendency in development of the meaning of English phraseological units, the role of metaphor and metonymy in semantic derivation of English phraseological units.

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The fruitful work is also held by E.V.Rijkina, who pays her attention to cognitive – communicative aspects of English phraseology. Her research is devoted to such aspects as: modeling of PhU, neology of PhU and historical phraseology, intertextuality of PhU, reflection of qualificative-evaluative person`s activity in pgraseology.

In modern linguistics we can see tendency of systematization of different types of contextual variation of meaning of language units for further discussion of actualization of significant units in the process of communication.

In spite of variety of researches in phraseological sphere, there is no unified scientifically valid system of interpretation of phraseological semantics regarding the context.

### Results and Discussion:-

Semantic actualization regarding PhU – is secondary profound plan of consideration of meaningful aspect of PhU due to the realization of their meaning; it is one of many directions of study of PhU in speech.

Componential analysis of lexical definitions shows that inanimation of specified object, the result of cogitative analysis, animation of addressee and addresser of action can be introduced as constant features in semantics of certain phraseological unit. Self-determination, objective facility, conditionality by circumstances, not in strict accordance with truth, right-mindedness and justifying reasons can be regarded as variativegeatures.

The performed analysis let us distinguish three groups of phraseologisms, which are similar in constant and variable semantic features in the structure of phraseological units.

The first group consist of phrasologisms with big constant zone and small variable zone. First of all, they are substantive (58%) and verbal (42%) phraseological units. The examples of such units are substantivePhU: a round (square) peg in a square (round) hole – someone or something that does not fit into a particular situation or position<sup>1</sup>; Darby and Joan – an old, devoted, happy married couple<sup>2</sup>; a thorn in one's flesh / side – a source of annoyance, irritation, grief, affliction, etc., esp. a persistent one<sup>3</sup>; Black Maria – vehicle for taking prisoners from and to gaol<sup>4</sup>, and verbal PhU: to eat one's words – take a statement back, say in a humble way that one was wrong<sup>5</sup>; to tread / step on someone's toes / corns – offend his feelings or prejudices<sup>6</sup>; to let bygones be bygones – to let past differences be forgotten<sup>7</sup>; to put / lay one's finger on – to express or name exactly (where something is, what is wrong, etc.)<sup>8</sup>.

Minimal semantic variation of substantive PhU and verbal PhU of this group in lexical definitions is presented by minimal range of contextual variation of their semantics, which is connected with a wide range of factors. Thus, the majority of such PhU possess motivative reasons and partial reconsideration of word-components. Partial reconsideration of components decreases the abstract level of denotate and constricts the range of nominative denotation.

Majority of substantive PhU of this group, presented by identifying sign and related peculiarities of their semantics and communicative-nominative function in context by predicate substantive PhU, possess such factors as predomination of denotive aspect above significative one in their semantics, restricted denotive belongings and unified reference group. The minor part of substantive PhU-predicates possesses very scarce semantic content as the result of their absolutely wide unified reference group.

<sup>1</sup>Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. 6th New edition 2014, Harlow, United Kingdom. - 2224 p.

<sup>2</sup>The Universal English Dictionary. Toppan Company, Limited. Tokyo, Japan (edited by H.C. Hyld).

<sup>3</sup> The Kenkyusha Dictionary of Current English Idioms / Ed.by Sauki Ichikawa. – Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1969.

<sup>4</sup> Stevenson, Angus, and Maurice Waite The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English. . - London: Oxford University Press; 12 edition, 2011. - 1682 p.

<sup>5</sup> A.S. Hornby, Wehmeier, Sally Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English. - London: Oxford University Press, 7 edition, 2005. - 2005. - 1780 p.

<sup>6</sup> Stevenson, Angus, and Maurice Waite The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English. . - London: Oxford University Press; 12 edition, 2011. - 1682 p.

<sup>7</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition 5 Edition Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Trade; 5 IndThm edition, 2011. US - 2112 p.

<sup>8</sup> Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Pearson Longman; 6th New edition (2014) Harlow, United Kingdom 30th. 2014. - 2224 p

Phraseological units of this group are homogeneous due to their semantic characteristics. They belong to a restricted sphere of nominative possess, that determines minimal variation of their semantics in the context.

The second group contains phraseologisms, characterized by a major level of semantic variation and minor level of constant semantic features. Above all, they are substantive PhU: the long and the short of it – recital at length<sup>9</sup>; a sheet anchor – a person or thing that can be turned to in time of emergency<sup>10</sup>; the last straw – an addition to a difficult job or situation that makes it almost unbearable; the final and most severe of a series of difficulties<sup>11</sup>; a dark horse – a person or thing whose character and qualities have still to be discovered<sup>12</sup>; and verbal PhU: to save one's breath – be silent<sup>13</sup>; to put one's shoulder to the wheel – work energetically at a task<sup>14</sup>; to chew the fat (rag) – to argue or discuss<sup>15</sup>.

Phraseologisms of given group possess an extensive reference group, a high level of generalization and abstractness of meaning. Majority of phraseological units with a small constant zone and large variable zone are characterized by total reconsideration of words-components. We can often see a different interpretation of the meaning between verbal PhU and substantive PhU of this group, sometimes distinguished by various lexicographs repugnant to semas.

Significative aspect of meaning in substantive PhU of this group prevails over denotative aspect and these units have a high level of abstractness.

Overwhelming majority of PhU of this group possess such features of PhU with extensive meaning as availability of generalizing abstract notion in the base of their meaning, high frequency of use, amplitude of combinability in context, semantic lack in context.

Phraseological units with large number of constant semantic features of phraseologisms and a large range of semantic variation in context, belong to the third group. Substantive phraseological units can be examples of mentioned above: rough and tumble – disorderly struggle, vigorous competition<sup>16</sup>, a white lie – a diplomatic or well – intentioned untruth<sup>17</sup>; Achilles'heel – small but weak or vulnerable point<sup>18</sup>; an early bird – early riser<sup>19</sup>; and verbal PhU: to make a virtue of necessity – feign alacrity or sense of duty while acting under compulsion<sup>20</sup>; to be/get on one's high horse – affect airs of superiority; behave haughtily or arrogantly<sup>21</sup>; to toe the line – to obey orders; accept the ideas, principles, etc., of another person or group<sup>22</sup>; to go out of one's / the way – make special effort to<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Stevenson, Angus, and Maurice Waite The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English. . - London: Oxford University Press; 12 edition, 2011. - 1682 p.

<sup>10</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition 5 Edition Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Trade; 5 IndThm edition1, 2011. - US. - 2112 p.

<sup>11</sup> Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. - 6th New edition edition. Harlow, United Kingdom 2224 p 30th , 2014. - 2224 p.

<sup>12</sup> The Kenkyusha Dictionary of Current English Idioms / Ed.by Sauki Ichikawa. – Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1969.

<sup>13</sup>Stevenson, Angus, and Maurice Waite The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English. . - London: Oxford University Press; 12 edition, 2011. - 1682 p.

<sup>14</sup> A.S. Hornby, Wehmeier, Sally Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English. - London: Oxford University Press, 7 edition, 2005. - 1780 p.

<sup>15</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition 5 Edition Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Trade; 5 IndThm edition, 2011. - US. - 2112 p.

<sup>16</sup> Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 6th New edition edition Harlow, United Kingdom 30th, 2014. - 2224 p.

<sup>17</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition 5 Edition Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Trade; 5 IndThm edition, 2011. US. - 2112 p.

<sup>18</sup> A.S. Hornby, Wehmeier, Sally Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English. - London: Oxford University Press, 7 edition, 2005. - 1780 p.

<sup>19</sup> Stevenson, Angus, and Maurice Waite The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English. . - London: Oxford University Press; 12 edition, 2011. - 1682 p.

<sup>20</sup> Stevenson, Angus, and Maurice Waite The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English. . - London: Oxford University Press; 12 edition, 2011. - 1682 p.

<sup>21</sup> The Kenkyusha Dictionary of Current English Idioms / Ed.by Sauki Ichikawa. – Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1969.

<sup>22</sup> Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. 6th New edition. Harlow, United Kingdom 30th, 2014. - 2224 p.

<sup>23</sup>The Universal English Dictionary. Toppan Company, Limited. Tokyo, Japan (edited by H.C. Hyld).

Among substantive PhU of this group we can meet motivated PhU and PhU with restricted meaning. There are no phraseologisms with extensive reference group and a high level of generalization.

All verbal PhU of this group are phraseologisms with entirely reconsidered components. A part of verbal PhU is presented by phraseologisms with an extensive meaning, capable of elaboration in every separate contextual use (to go to pieces, to hold one's own, to cross swords, etc.).

During explanation of their meaning, not more than two semantic features are distinguished, however, a qualitative variation of one of the features can seem significant. The rest of verbal PhU are less extensively meaningful and distinguished with the help of wide range of semantic features, one part of which is explained identically, others are varied.

The results of the research revealed that semantics of verbal PhU is affected more by variation due to lexicographical explanation than semantics of substantive PhU: 52 % of verbal PhU belong to phraseological groups with a large of variation and only 38 % are composed by substantive PhU.

Verbal PhU and larger part of substantive PhU are predicate units of the language. Features of predicate noun, being separated from denotate, have obligatory process of abstractness in thoughts of the members of language society. This process is more active if there is a notion of high-level abstractness in the base of meaning of PhU. Designatum aims to be out of frames of denotatum and acquire other functions. It goes with a predicate use of the word, which reveals subjective outlook at spoken patterns. An extensive meaningful base, abstract character of denotatum of verbal PhU and substantive PhU create facilities for subjective comprehension of semantic features of phraseologisms and cause not only contextual variation of these features, but variation while describing meanings of phraseologisms in dictionaries as well.

The level and the range of semantic variation of verbal PhU and substantive PhU during lexicographic interpretation of semantics cause the variation of their meaning during contextual use that determined by semantic peculiarities of any phraseological units.

The most important semantic characteristics that causes contextual variation of meaning of both syntactic types – verbal PhU and substantive PhU – is a total or partial reconsideration of components of phraseologisms. Entirely reconsidered meaning of PhU, being the base of abstractness of meaning, cause a larger range of variation of phraseological meaning in context.

The next step of research includes the study of textual realization of analyzed verbal PhU and substantive phraseological units. Performed analysis showed us that contextual semantic oscillations of meaning of analyzed PhU are inherent for 97,7% of analyzed phraseological usage. Contextual semantic modification of phraseologisms is rather rare, only 2,3% of textual realizations of PhU.

Contextual semantic oscillations appear in actualization in context usage of features, incoming in variative semantic zone of phraseologism, than can be illustrated on the example of substantive PhU “a man of the world”.

Thus, we find the following information in Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English: a person who has wide experience of life, esp. one who enjoys expensive amusements and tolerates the habits and amusements of other people; в Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English: one with wide experience of business and society;в The Universal English Dictionary: one with knowledge of life and mankind; в The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: a sophisticated, worldly man; в The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English: experienced practical tolerant person.

Pointing out the person and “wide experience of life”, concerns constant semantic features of given substantive PhU. “Enjoys expensive amusements”, “tolerates the habits and amusements of other people”, “sophisticated” – can be regarded as variative semantic features.

Analysis of contextual usage shows that features of constant zone are actualized in all cases. Analysis was done by comparing several contexts of use of the same PhU. E.g. “a man of the world” in O.Wilde's, “An Ideal Husband”; S. Maugham's “The Painted Veil”, “The Pacts of Life”; J. Mortimer “The Dock Brief”.

Morgenhall: ...I should have said – “Members of the jury. Is there one of you who doesn't crave for peace... Have you never been tempted?” I should have said, "Members of the jury. You and I are men of the world..." (J.Mortimer. The Dock Brief. Scene 1.)

1. After all, you must admit that my advice was good.
2. Very good.
3. And that the wretched boy ought to have burnt his fingers. Well, he hasn't. You're all men of the world, you tell me how I'm to deal with the situation now. (S.Maugham. The Pacts of Life).

Mrs. Cheveley: ...And if you do what I ask you, I... will pay you very handsomely!

Sir Robert Chiltern: I am afraid I don't quite understand what you mean.

Mrs. Cheveley: ...My dear Sir Robert, you are a man of the world, and you have your price, I suppose. Everybody has nowadays... (O. Wilde. An Ideal Husband. Act 1.)

Fleming: ...You see, before, I only thought things were rather queer. It's come as, well, as a shock to discover exactly what the relations are between all these people. And what I can't very easily get over is to realize that I'm the only member of the party who doesn't take it as a matter of course.

Clay: We shall never make a man of the world of you, Fleming. (S. Maugham. Our Betters. Act 3.)

1. “If the worst comes to the worst I shall have to tell the Governor. He'll curse me like hell, but he's a good fellow and a man of the world. He'll fix it up somehow. It wouldn't do him any good if there was a scandal”.
2. “What can he do?” asked Kitty.
3. “He can bring pressure to bear on Walter...” (S. Maugham. The Painted Veil. Ch.XXIV.)

As a result of comparison of different context, we can see that in the first case the leading part belongs to semantic feature, pointing at “tolerant towards the habits of other people” and a feature, revealing “wide experience of life”, other features are not so important. In the second context the dominant role belongs to the features, showing “wide experience of life” and “sophisticated”; other semantic features are not paid attention to. In the third context, all mentioned above features are actualized equally. In the fourth context all variative features are also actualized, but the feature “tolerant towards the habits of other people” becomes leading. In the first context, in accordance with the leading role of the same feature and total actualization of the feature “wide experience of life”, other features like “sophisticated” and “enjoys expensive amusements” lose their significance.

The reason of contextual semantic oscillations is in adaptation to the meaning of PhU for more adequate reflection of characteristics of a certain object in a certain context. The range of this adaptation is determined by such factors as semantic potentials of PhU, absence/presence and character of occasional conversions, communicative intention of a speaker, characteristics and peculiarities of the referent, peculiarities of a certain context, and frequency of PhU, which promotes the extension of actualization of variative features.

The study of textual material confirmed the right method of learning of correlation of constant and variative features in phraseological semantics, according to comparative analysis of their lexical definition.

Consideration of contextual semantic oscillations of PhU which take thematic or rhematic place in utterance, showed that phraseologisms take rhematic position in utterance more often and thematic position in communicative-textual thematic block. Thematic block was described in our research as the highest meaningful unity in dialogical speech, depicted according to relation of utterances in its content.

Realization of phraseologisms as a theme or rheme of the thematic block influences greatly the range of contextual semantic oscillations.

Analyze showed that distribution of PhU, characterized by contextual semantic oscillations, can be presented by the following quantitative indicators. Total number of realizations of verbal PhU and substantive PhU – 730: a) usual use – 532; b) occasional use – 198. Quantity of realizations of verbal PhU and substantive PhU, used as the elements of communicative center in thematic blocks – 248: a) usual use – 197; b) occasional use – 51. Quantity of realizations of verbal PhU and substantive PhU, not used as the elements of communicative center in thematic blocks – 482: a) usual use – 335 ; b) occasional use – 147.

In this way, PhU characterized by contextual semantic oscillations, take a rhematic position in thematic block more rarely.

The study of contextual semantic modifications of verbal PhU and substantive PhU in the context shows that conditions of their appearance differentiate from general conditions, pointing at contextual semantic oscillations. Factors that cause appearance of contextual semantic modifications are rhematization of PhU in thematic block of the text – 88% of contextual semantic modifications took place in PhU that were used as communicative center of thematic block of the text; besides, pragmatic direction and aim of the speaker to influence an interlocutor emotionally, and a stylistic function of PhU in the context are important as well.

Realization of these factors can be seen on the example of contextual semantic modifications of meaning of a substantive PhU “a dog in the manger”.

"Fowle. - Oh, that – it's not Important.

Morgenhall. – Not?

Fowle (rising). – I don't care about it to any large extent. Not as at present advised... I can't believe it's me concerned.

Morgenhall. - But it is you, Mr.Fowle. You mustn't let yourself forget that. You see, that's why your're here... You seem, if I may say so - (he rises) to have adopted un unpleasantly selfish attitude.

Fowle. - Selfish?

Morgenhall. - Dog in the manger.

Fowle. - In the...?

Morgenhall.- Unenthusiastic." (J.Mortimer.The Dock Brief).

In this contextual use PhU “a dog in the manger” – one who neither makes use of a thing himself, nor will permit other to do so – the activity of agent noun is not actualized. Semas “useless to the agent” and “selfish” belonging to variation range, contradict with notional characteristics described in the given context, as there is no will of the criminal to help the advocate who defends him.

Appearance of contextual semantic modifications is caused by use of PhU at the end of thematic block (76%), when phraseologism is directed to the semantics of the whole thematic block.

### **Conclusion:-**

1. The performed research showed that communicative dynamism of PhU is a very important factor, caused by appearance of contextual semantic modifications of PhU.
2. Occasional conversions of phraseologisms play less important part in extension of contextual range of semantic changes. PhU in occasional use are mostly characterized by contextual semantic oscillations.
3. The role of different methods of occasional conversion of PhU informing contextual semantic modifications is various. Forming of contextual semantic modifications is mostly caused by double actualization and antonymic change.
4. The performed research showed that contextual mechanisms of semantic change of the meaning of PhU in textual use are mostly general as for substantive, so for verbal phraseologisms.
5. It's obvious to make a further analysis of contextual variation of semantics of phraseologisms of other structural types.
6. More detailed study of pragmatic factors should be paid attention to, being the reason of appearance of contextual variation of phraseological units.
7. The research of the character of connections between several possible occasional meanings of phraseologisms and their phrase-semantic variants attracts attention by analyzing constant and variative zones in semantics of phraseologisms.