

English and French Metaphorically-Motivated Phraseological Units Containing Religious Terms¹

Anna V. Dengina², Elena F. Arsenteva³, & Elena A. Nikulina⁴

Abstract

The central point of discussion is how distinctive features of a traditional for English or French-speakers religious practice are reflected in the metaphorically motivated phraseological units of the English and French languages, containing a religious term. Such phraseological units constitute a substantial part of the phraseological corpuses of the languages being compared. Thus they are capable of reflecting not just individual associations connected with that or another religious term, but they can throw light on real trends showing how phraseology reflects certain aspects of traditional religious practice typical of the English and French cultures. The research has involved 500 French and 200 English metaphorically-motivated phraseological units containing a religious term, chosen from bilingual or monolingual idioms dictionaries. The analysis of their inner form reveals that in both languages being studied most of the metaphorically-motivated phraseological units containing a religious term are aimed at human beings, i.e. human in most cases appear as a target domain of metaphorical transposition of meaning. However as far as the source domain is concerned, notions connected with religious rites, cult procedures and objects are more characteristic of the French language, while the English phraseology mostly appeal to the general religious ideas as the source domain for metaphor-based phraseological units.

Keywords: Phraseological Unit; Religious Term; Phraseological Meaning; Motivation; Metaphor.

1. Introduction

Comparative study of the groups of phraseological units (PUs) containing particular terms represents one of the modern fields of research in the study of the phraseological corpuses (including proverbs) in different languages. The formation

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² Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russia.

³ Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russia; elenaarsentiewa@mail.ru

⁴ Moscow Pedagogical State University

of the general phraseological meaning of such PUs has been of considerable interest for researches (Айупова, 2014; Gulimila et al., 2016; Konopleva & Kayumova, 2014). This interest can be explained by the fact that using PUs speakers express their thoughts without naming the object of speech directly. The transference of the meaning from one denotation to another and the subsequent formation of the phraseological meaning in most cases is based on the mechanism of metaphor (Dobrovolskiy & Piirainen, 2018; Abbasi, & Zare, 2016). Motivation, inner form and national aspects also play an important role in this process (Byiyk et al., 2017; Gataullina et al., 2016; Yerbulatova et al., 2018; Ayebo, & Mrutu, 2019). At the same time metaphorically motivated PUs represent one of the most original groups of PUs in different languages, and as far as the PUs with the religious terms are concerned, they can even reflect the religious traditions typical of that or another country. Traditional interpretation of metaphor in Russian linguistics is “transposition of denomination from one denotation to another on the basis of real or imaginary similarity” (Кунин, 2005).

In foreign linguistics the modern period of research of metaphor started with the work of the founder of an interactionist approach to metaphor M. Black. To his opinion, two heterogeneous objects – the main, being denoted in the process of metaphorisation, and the subsidiary, related to the denotation of an existing denomination. Interaction of this two notions is determined by such processes as focusing – determination of the main object, obviously metaphorical word or expression, put in a framework of literal meanings of words, and filtration, when the idea of the main object is filtered through the subsidiary object – its associative complex (Блэк, 1990).

The cognitive approach to metaphor implies its interpretation as a result of the procession of knowledge. In the frame of the cognitive theory of metaphor the latter is considered as a conceptual phenomenon – the result of interaction between different structures of knowledge (Баранов & Д, 2008). The process of metaphorisation in this case is understood as metaphorical projection, or interaction between two conceptual structures – cognitive structure of the source domain and cognitive structure of the target domain. In the process of transposition of meaning some of the frames in the target domain are structured on the model of the source domain – cognitive reflection is taking place (Баранов, 2014).

According to the ideas of modern cognitive science, knowledge is stored in our conscience in the form of frames and scripts. With reference to phraseology a frame is defined as a strictly structured piece of data, that in the semantics of a PU represents knowledge about one of the stereotype situations. If a frame represents knowledge in the dynamics, script shows a coherent sequence of events (Алефиренко, 2011; Cambridge Idioms Dictionary, 2006). So in the frame of the cognitive approach to metaphor, the formation of the phraseological meaning is explained as a result of the interaction between different frames.

Deduction of a phraseological meaning sometimes is really impossible without certain cognitive procedures, appealing to experience, which is also true about the metaphorical fixed expressions, based on the shift of meaning of notions belonging to the field of religion. Thus, the source domain for the English idiom ‘*broad church*’ – *an organization that includes many different types of people with different opinions* [CID 52] is one of the currents in the Anglican church, called Broad church and including protestant, catholic and Anglican elements. This metaphor is founded on the similarity based on the idea of heterogeneity. But only for those who possess the necessary experience and are familiar with the situation in the Church of England this idiom would be transparent. The same is true about the French idiom *cela ne s'est pas fait par l'opération du Saint-Esprit* (*lit. this was not made just by the Holy Spirit*), because its comprehension is only possible in case of the awareness of recipient of the Christian dogma of the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ.

2. Methods

Our research requires scrutinizing the meaning of each phraseological unit dealt with, therefore semantic analysis is the inherent part of our work.

Comparative method is absolutely necessary to compare phraseological units belonging to different groups of Indo-European family of languages. It is accompanied by the methods of observation and description.

Applying the method of phraseological application aimed at studying the inner form of the phraseological units is seen as one of the necessary steps in revealing the facts of representation of religious traditions in metaphorical expressions. The author of this method, Russian scientist V. Jukov, defines it as the application of a PU on to a free word combination with the same constituents, if it exists, or comparing the general meaning of a PU with meanings of free words – analogues of its constituents, if a free word combination cannot be formed (Жуков, 1986). To complete the research, we also employ here the method of componential analysis and the method of dictionary definitions.

3. Results and Discussion

Metaphor is based on the idea of similarity between two heterogeneous and incompatible in reality objects. Emerging during the comparison of the objects, belonging to different classes, as Arutunova states, “metaphor rejects the affiliation of an object with certain class of objects, and includes it into a category to which it cannot normally be attributed on the sensible basis” (Арутюнова, 2012). Accordingly, four constituents participate in the creation and, consequently, the analysis of a metaphor: two categories of objects and the characteristics of each of them, which creates semantic duality of metaphor. Choosing characteristics of one

category of objects, metaphor attributes them to a different category or one of its constituents – main (actual) subject of metaphor (Арутюнова, 2012)

The national specificity of metaphorical PUs consists in the fact that conscience of representatives of different language groups chooses different features in the same phenomena that then serve as a basis for metaphorisation. Interestingly enough, a researcher, discovering these original features lying at basis of a metaphor, receives some insights into the difference in perception that people speaking different languages have of the same notion.

For example, the literal meaning of the PU *lenten fare* is food permitted during fasting days or Lent, while its phraseological meaning is meagre diet. Both meanings imply common ideas of meagerness, lack of variety. But in the French language an equivalent constituent *carême, m* appears in such idiom as *amoureux de carême* (*lit. enamoured as in Lent*) – *shy admirer*, having reference to the prohibition of love affairs during Lent.

The statement that in the languages being compared the same notions have different capability of metaphorisation can be proved on the example of PUs with constituents *hell / enfer, m*. The number of metaphorical PUs with this constituent in the English language by far exceeds the figure of the French language (48 vs. 28 PUs). Of both languages being compared the transposition of meaning based on the association with suffering is typical, compare ‘*put smb through hell – to cause someone’s suffering*’, ‘*smell hell – to suffer*’ or ‘*porter son enfer avec soi* (*lit. bring all one’s hell with oneself*) – *to conceal one’s suffering*’.

But at the same time in English plenty of set expressions exist, which are founded on totally different associations, such as idea of hopelessness in the following expression: *not a cat in hell’s chance*, implying a situation of a cat that cannot definitely survive in hell, where, according to a traditional conception, all is fire and any being is not able to survive. Motivation of such expressions as *until (or till) hell freezes over* and *when hell freezes over*, meaning never, is founded on the associations of hell with extremely high temperature, which are not apparent in the French culture too.

As far as the dependence between the source domain and the target domain is concerned, in both languages being considered in most cases a human being functions as the target domain, which proves the general idea of the anthropomorphous character of metaphor.

For example, expression *have bats (in your) in the belfry* refers to the way in which bats in an enclosed space fly about wildly if they are disturbed (Ayto, 2010), which creates an idea of chaos. Then a projection of this idea onto a human, or their head in particular, is taking place, which creates the idea of disorder in thoughts leading to the phraseological meaning *eccentric* or *crazy*.

The same way the French expression *grenouille de bénitier* (*lit. a toad in the stoup*) is also aimed at characteristic of a human – that is how French call people spending a lot of time in church (Rey & Chantreau, 2013). At a literal level this expression contains a reference to a basin for holy water, especially on the wall near the door of a Roman Catholic church, where worshippers can dip their fingers in before crossing themselves. And usually it is near the entrance to the church, where such stoups normally are situated, that people who try to produce an impression of very pious and devoted, spend time by idle conversations, which would not be really typical of a really devoted person. But the whole phraseological meaning here is created by the interaction of three, not just two frames, because the idea of disgust for such people is intensified by the implied comparison of their voice to toad's croaking. So in this case the idiom is motivated by the whole complex of associations activated simultaneously.

Discussing the metaphorical phraseological units with a religious term from the point of view of their source domain, we should note that the main difference between the languages being compared is that the English language mostly addresses general religious notions while studying the French set expressions at their literal level we would mostly find mentioning of various objects of cult, church interior, prayer titles.

Titles of Catholic prayers are fixed in such French expressions as *corriger le magnificat* (*lit. change the Magnificat*), where *Magnificat* represents the name of the prayer to the Holy Virgin, which is sung during religious service. This hymn has always been considered very beautiful, the most outstanding composers created music for it. So the inner form of this expression suggests the idea of excessive self-assessment, overestimation of one's capabilities.

Another prayer mentioned in the French phraseology is *litanie, f/ litany* – a series of petitions for use in church services or processions, usually recited by the clergy and responded to in a recurring formula by the people, implying the idea of boredom and repetitiveness, cf. *c'est toujours la même litanie* (*lit. again the same litany*).

English metaphorical expressions mostly include religious terms of the theological character, cf. idiom *till (to) the crack of doom*, suggesting the idea of thunder announcing the Last Judgement, that comes from several passages in the book of Revelation (e.g., 6:1, 8:5) (Ayto, 2010). Phraseological meaning here is 'never, for an endless period of time', that can last until unknown moment, as no one knows when exactly the Last Judgment would start.

The English phraseological corpus also includes a number of PUs, the literal meaning of which is connected with the religious denominations different from Christianity, mostly Judaism, or even connected with Indian culture, cf. *a sacred cow - an idea, custom, or institution held, especially unreasonably, to be above*

questioning or criticism (Ayto, 2010), founded on a well-known fact that cow as a sacred animal in the Hindu religion.

4. Summary

The research has shown that in the compared languages most of the metaphorically-motivated PUs are aimed at humans. However, as far as the source of the transposition of the metaphorical meaning is concerned, the French language, created in the Catholic France, more often addresses the notions, connected with cult and rites, while the English language possesses more metaphorically-motivated idioms with religious terms of theological character. This difference can, evidently, be explained by the fact that the Anglican Church gives less importance to the cult than Catholic Church. We should also state that the English phraseological corpus contains far more expressions having reference to other religions rather than Christianity.

5. Conclusions

The fulfilled analysis of the inner form of PUs with a religious term in the English and French languages enables us to conclude that besides the existence of some common trends in the metaphorical transposition of meaning of word combinations with a religious term, conscience of English and French speakers tends to address different aspects of religion as the source for PUs, which correlates with differences existing between the practices of the Church of England and the Catholic Church being traditional religious denominations for England and France. This can be considered as one of the reasons determining the originality of the phraseological corpuses of English and French.

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