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### **Polysemantic Phraseology in English**

The article deals with the initial considerations on polysemy in phraseology as part of a large research project on polysemy. To investigate the interrelationship between polysemy and its constituent parts and the influence of context and style on the rise of polysemy is viewed as a context-based network of semantic variants. Phraseological units are word-groups which are not made in the process speech. They exist in the language as ready-made units. American and British lexicographers call them «idioms». Phraseological units consist of words and they are different words. As the majority of words phraseological units can be polysemantic as well. Most studies of polysemy focus on the polysemy of individual words.

**Key words:** polysemy, phraseology, metaphor, metonymy.

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#### **Полисемантическая фразеология на английском языке**

Статья посвящена полисемантической фразеологии на английском языке. Автор исследует связи между многозначностью и ее составными частями и влиянием контекста и стиля, повышающего их многозначность. Полисемантика была рассмотрена как основная часть в контексте семантических вариантов. Фразеологизмы – словосочетания, которые не могут быть образованы в процессе речи. Они существуют в языке как готовые единицы. Американские и британские лексикографы называют их «идиомами». Фразеологизмы состоят из слов, и они – различные слова. Как большинство полисемантических слов, во фразеологизмах они могут быть также полисемантическими. Большинство исследований многозначности сосредоточивается на многозначности отдельных слов.

**Ключевые слова:** многозначность, фразеология, метафора, метонимия.

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#### **Ағылшын тіліндегі полисемантикалық фразеология**

Мақала ағылшын тіліндегі полисемантикалық фразеологияға арналған. Автор көпмағыналылық пен оның құрамдық бөліктерінің арасындағы байланысқан және олардың көпмағыналылығын арттыратын контекст пен стильдің әсерін зерттеген. Полисемантика семантикалық нұсқалар контекстінде негізгі бөлім ретінде қарастырылған. Фразеологизмдер – сөйлеу процесінде жасалуы мүмкін емес сөз тіркестері. Олар тілде дайын бірлік ретінде өмір сүреді, американдық және ағылшын (британдық) лексикографтар оларды «идиомалар» деп атайды. Фразеологизмдер тұрақты сөздер, құрамында әртүрлі сөздер болады. Полисемантикалық сөздердің көпшілігі сияқты фразеологизмдер де полисемантикалық бола алады. Көпмағыналылықты зерттеушілердің көпшілігі жеке сөздердің көпмағыналылығына тоқталады.

**Түйін сөздер:** көпмағыналылық, фразеология, метафора, метонимия.

Phraseological units are word-groups which cannot be made in the process of speech. They exist in the language as ready-made units. But

American and British lexicographers call them «idioms». Phraseological units consist of words and they are different words. As the majority of words,

phraseological units can be polysemantic as well. Most studies of polysemy focus on the polysemy of individual words.

By a variety of sense – shift due to the use in different contexts a single phraseological unit can be made to express variant meanings. Changes in the distribution of polysemic phraseological unit may lead to essential change in the semantic value. The context makes the necessary meaning clear, narrowing down all the other possible meanings of the phrase and no ambiguity arises.

Phraseological dictionaries give numerous examples of context sensitive implication observed in phraseology. A few of them will serve for illustrations:

1) the phrase *to be on the go* can mean: a) *to be at work, to be on the move*; b) *to be going to leave*; c) *to be in a hurry*; d) *to be in one's cups*.

Cf.: a) Her real faith – what was it? Not to let a friend down... not to funk; to do things differently from other people; *to be always on the go*, not to be stuffy, not to be dull (Galsworthy);

b) The guest *was on the go* for half an hour though the host began to show signs of importance;

c) He *is always on to go*;

d) The wine made him a little bit *on the go*, etc.

2) the phrase *to hold (keep) up one's end* can mean: a) *to make both ends meet*; b) *to stand on one's ground, not to give in, not to lose one's courage, not to disgrace oneself*, etc.

E.g. How is Dinny? Very low in her mind. But she *keeps her end up* (Galsworthy).

As phraseology is concerned with multiword units, they are polysemantic themselves. Any account of polysemy in phraseology should be able to deal with polysemy at different levels [11].

There are phrases which are highly polysemantic like «at one's wits end» which besides their literal reading (unable to think clearly and at a loss about what to do next in a state of frustration) may have the following readings: the word *wits* means *mental faculties*; *at the end of one's rope*; *to keep one's wits about oneself*; *to use one's wits*; *no longer able to deal with a bad situation*, etc.

For example: The woman looked around and couldn't find her little daughter. Frantically she looked up and down every aisle in the store until she *was at her wits' end*. She was almost hysterical when another customer in the store told her she should notify the store's security officer [9, 3].

The idiomatic meaning of the expression *to be at one's wits end* is polysemantic and semantically related to be the metaphorical extension. It gave rise

to polysemy. The semantic change from the literal meaning to the idiomatic meaning is not polysemy, but the semantic shift diverging from the idiomatic meaning.

Many authors have noticed similar cases of context-based polysemy. Cruse A.D. stressed that the meaning of words is effected by context. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that the semantic contribution a word makes is different for every distinct context in which it occurs [4, 187].

Polysemy is characteristic of most phraseological units in many languages, they may be different. But it is more characteristic of the English vocabulary. The greater frequency of the phraseological units, the greater the number of variants that constitute their semantic structure, i.e. the more polysemantic they are.

Consider some of the variants of a very frequent, and consequently polysemantic phrase «*bottom line*». We define the main variant «the net result» as in «You've told me about the down payment the closing costs the interest rate and the price of the house. What's *the bottom line*? How much money am I actually going to have to spend to buy the house?» The basic meaning may be extended to irrefutable truth: «You and I can argue around and around on this issue, but the *bottom line* is that our children will have to go to college if they want to get well-paid jobs in the future»

The expression probably originates from the accounting practice of adding together the profits and subtracting the costs to arrive at a final figure under the *bottom line* on a spreadsheet or in a ledger or account book [9, 8]. It has other variants, such as: *the nitty gritty*. This expression is often used to describe a monetary figure (sentence 1), but it also describes the basic (supposedly) undeniable truth of an argument (sentence 2).

The difference of meaning is reflected in the difference of syntactic valency. Every meaning in language and every difference in meaning is signaled either by the form of the components of phraseological units or by context, i.e. syntagmatic relations depending on the position in the spoken chain. The unity of the two facets of a linguistic sign is kept in its grammatical variant. Lexical-grammatical variant of a phraseological unit forms its semantic structure. In the semantic structure of the unit *to lose one's temper* two lexical-grammatical variants may be distinguished: *to become suddenly angry*, *to lose one's cool* – means *not to remain calm*.

In the sentence *The children's mother was tired of asking them to pick up their toys. Finally she lost*

*her temper and yelled at them* the variants are *to blow one's stack, to fly off the handle, to see red, to get hot under the collar* and so on. *To lose one's temper* is less colloquial than these other expressions. These variants form the close meaning and polysemous set, because they are expressed by the same close shades of meaning. Besides, they are interrelated in meaning as they all contain the semantic interrelation. This can be explained by means of one another.

Phraseological polysemy is found to appear at two levels: the level of literal use and idiomatic use. These levels are very important in creating phraseological polysemy [10]. For example: *albatross around one's neck* – it means something or someone who is a burden and generally hard to get rid of. It has one more variant *millstone around one's neck*. In both variants the meaning is figurative, only the first component is substituted. The first phraseological unit is that which possesses the highest frequency at the present stage of vocabulary development, whereas the second is used colloquially. If the variants are classified not only by comparing them inside the semantic structure of the phraseological unit, but according to the style, if they have stylistical connotations, the classification is stylistical.

It is known that diachronic and synchronic approaches are closely interconnected as the new meanings are understood, because of their motivation by the previous meaning. For example: *between a rock and a hard place*. It is used in different ways because of being polysemantic: *between two difficult situation* is literal meaning, but it has other figurative and idiomatic meanings. Such as: *between the devil and the deep blue sea; in a bind; in a fit; in a jam; over a barrel*. *Between a rock and a hard place* is more dramatic than *in a bind*, and it would be used when the problem of choice has no apparent or easy solution. For example: *Ralf found out that his brother cheated on an exam. He knows he should tell the teacher but he is hesitating because he's his brother. He has caught between a rock and a hard place*. Or in another sentence: *The doctor told her his patient that had a very contagious disease and that it was important to tell his family. The man refused. The doctor didn't know if he should call his parent's family and tell them or not. He was between a rock and a hard place*. The first – literary meaning – is nautical expression and is used by sailors.

It must be noted that polysemy is a phenomenon of language, not of speech. The contexts in

which phraseological units are observed to occur permit lexicographers to record cases of identical meaning and cases which differ in meaning. They can be found in dictionaries. The contextual meaning represents only one of the possible variants of the phraseological unit, but one variant may render a complicated notion or emotion into several senses. Polysemy does not interfere with the communicative function of the language, as the situation and context cancel all the unwanted meanings. For example: *blue ribbon* – it has two meanings – 1) renowned and 2) first prize. They are clearly understood only in the context. Such as: 1) *The president assembled a blue ribbon panel of experts to study the problem*, 2) *Sally's science project won the blue ribbon because it was the best in the contest*.

The expression originates from the blue ribbon that was presented to the best entry in a contest. The meanings of *blue ribbon* are comprehended only in the context (as in the sentences above). Contextual meanings of phraseological units are used for a particular occasion [8, 50-55].

It is interesting to note that the polysemantic phraseological unit *not (without) a stitch to one's back* is a phraseological euphemism in both meanings: 1) absolutely naked, 2) very poor. Phraseological functions of the condition of pregnancy and human nakedness are considered to be indecent or not worth speaking about in normal society according to moral principles existing in such a society.

Polysemy in phraseology may be divided into two different levels: the phrase level and the level of individual idiom constituents. Example:

If we look at the phraseological combination «red-eye», we shall see that it has many meanings a real meaning *symptom in medicine, as something is wrong with one's eye*, as in slang in America *a night flight*, as a *danger sign in a railroad* and so on. If it is used as a slang *night flight* it means an airplane flight which departs between 01.00 a.m. and 04.00 a.m local time.

It can be used as a *type of drug, bad whisky, red-eyed animal* (for example, wolves), *railroad sign of danger* showing that there is danger in a distance and so on. All of them are idiomatic readings, but the original meaning is *the colour of someone's eyes is red*, may be it is red because of his or her sickness.

In 1905 Palm defines polysemy in phraseology as multiple meanings of units. He states that polysemy in phraseology is wide-spread and well-developed phenomenon [10].

The problem of polysemy in phraseology is mainly the problem of interrelation and interdependence of

various meanings of the same words in phraseology and the meaning of the whole units. Polysemy itself viewed diachronically is the historical change in the

semantic structure of phraseological units. It results in disappearance of some meanings and in new meanings being added to the ones already existing.

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