

Linguoculturological analysis of English and Russian idioms with ornithonyms

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Abstract. In the modern conditions of globalization, there are new requirements for university graduates. They should not only know a foreign language, but also a well-formed intercultural competence. The authors distinguish cultural interpretation as one of the ways of forming intercultural competence. Cultural interpretation helps to identify the national and cultural specifics of idioms, in which there is information about the world of a particular country, its lifestyle, and traditions. The internal form of idioms contains a set of cultured ideas about the world picture of a particular society. The idioms with the ornithonym component reflect the specific division of this sphere of reality. This language layer has not been sufficiently studied. The authors give the linguoculturological analysis of the Russian and English idioms with the components “swallow” and “peacock”. Culture codes and sources of cultural interpretation are analyzed from the cultural and linguistic points of view. The Russian and English idioms with the ornithonyms are compared. The authors conclude that the comparative analysis of idioms shows the difference in the linguistic world views and sheds light on the ethnic logic. The research findings can be used in teaching a foreign language to comprehend the culture of native speakers.

Keywords: linguoculturological analysis, cultural interpretation, culture code, ornithonym

1 Introduction

In modern conditions of globalization and increasing competition in the global labor market, universities face the problem of how to prepare graduates for effective interaction with representatives of other cultures [1]. Graduates should have a well-formed intercultural competence in order to easily navigate in numerous cultural contexts [2-4]. They should be able to identify similarities and differences between their culture and the culture of the language under studies [5]. Idioms in a foreign language are particularly difficult for students because they reflect the reality which has relevance to historical and spiritual experience of the nation [6]. Ornithonyms occupy one of the leading positions in

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terms of the frequency of occurrence in idioms. Idioms with the ornithonyms emphasize the mentality of any nation, since a certain number of bird names and the frequency of their use are a significant part of the linguistic world view of its representatives [7, 8].

Many scientists investigated the etymological, linguistic and cultural aspects of idioms with the ornithonyms in various languages [9, 10]. Comparative analysis of idioms with the ornithonym components in Russian and English is given in the works of Yakovleva[11], Krepkogorskaya[12]. They focused on the study of idioms with the names of the most common birds that surround a person, such as “goose”, “chicken”, and “duck”. Idioms that contain the names of rare birds have not been sufficiently studied, that is why the Russian and English idioms with the components “swallow” and “peacock” have been chosen for detailed consideration. The purpose of the study is to analyze the national features of idioms with the components “swallow” and “peacock”. To achieve this purpose the authors defined the following objectives: to identify universal and national features in the Russian and English idioms with the components “swallow” and “peacock”, to determine the sources of the appearance of national and cultural specifics.

2 Methods

The main purpose of the study is to determine the national and cultural specifics of the Russian and English idioms with ornithonyms. To achieve the purpose the authors employed the following research methods: linguoculturological analysis, modeling method, continuous sampling method and comparison. The aforementioned methods allowed the researchers to identify and describe the features of the idioms with ornithonyms in English and Russian. The material for the research includes 12 Russian and English idioms with the components “swallow” and “peacock”.

3 Results and Discussion

Idioms arise from the intersection of language and culture. They contain information about the world of a particular country, its history, lifestyle, and traditions.

Idioms have an internal form, which is defined as a way of delivering meaning, motivated by a figurative foundation and encouraging the use of this meaning in speech, and which is closely related to the culture.

An ornithonym is a nominative unit represented by a single word or a combination of words, which serves to individualize and identify a bird. The idioms with ornithonyms act as signs of secondary naming. Their characteristic feature is figurative and situational motivation, which is directly related to the worldview of the people.

The cultural and linguistic specifics of idioms are carried out through cultural interpretation. Kovshova[13] considers that the cultural interpretation of a fixed phrase is a reference to the subject matter of culture. The number of cultured worldview sources captured by idioms is diverse.

In addition, the internal form of the idiom contains a culture code, which is a set of cultured ideas about the world image of a particular society.

The idioms with ornithonyms reflect the specific division of this sphere of reality. In their internal form there are various cultural codes and cultural phenomena such as: archetypes, myths, customs, rituals, traditions, historical events and elements of material and intellectual culture.

We consider some English and Russian idioms with the component “swallow”.

In both languages the idioms with this component are classified into the following lexico-semantic groups: abstract concepts, metaphysical categories, proverbs, and sayings.

The study identified English and Russian idioms with the specified component, which have the same meaning, but their internal form is slightly different. This is an idiom with semantics that reflects the cognitive criterion “the unacceptability of hasty conclusions based just on one situation”. The English idiom “one swallow does not make a summer” and the Russian idiom “one swallow is not a sign of spring” mean “the impossibility of generalizing something based on just one fact”. The component of the idioms “one” corresponds to the digital code of culture. The component of the idioms “swallow” belongs to the zoomorphic cultural code, in which the swallow is a harbinger of something, a symbol of the first, early signs of something that we cannot trust. The component “does not make” corresponds to the action cultural code. The components “summer” and “spring” correlate with the natural landscape code of culture due to the reflection of ideas about nature as a fragment of the linguistic world view [14], as well as with the temporal code of culture due to the sequence of events on the time axis relative to each other [15]. The internal form of the expression dates back to Aesop’s fable.

We consider a Russian idiom with the component “swallow”, which has semantics that reflects the cognitive criterion “the first manifestation of something”. The Russian idiom “the first swallow” has two meanings: 1) the earliest, the first signs of the manifestation, the onset of something and 2) the first in a line of subsequent ones. It is implied that subsequently a new phenomenon, event became widespread. The image of the idiom traces back to the ancient mythological ideas about the swallow as a messenger of spring. The Slavic peoples have a tradition of performing magical rituals at the sight of the first swallow in the spring. The idiom components correspond to a combination of numerical and zoomorphic culture codes. The latter serves as the basis for a cultured idea of the characteristics of animals and the peculiarities of their behavior as a source of human understanding of the world. In this case, the idiom reflects the idea of the swallow as a bird with the appearance of which the spring renewal is associated. The image of the idiom is based on a zoomorphic metaphor that compares the harbinger of an event, a phenomenon to the first swallow, whose arrival indicates the beginning of spring. The idiom acts as a symbol of some event or action.

We examine some English and Russian idioms with the component “peacock”. During the study, 6 idioms with this component in English and 3 idioms in Russian were identified by the continuous sampling method.

In these languages, idioms with the component “peacock” are classified into the following lexico-semantic groups: characteristics of a person, his qualities, state, mood, and social position; lifestyle, habits of people; and heraldry. In English and Russian, there are idioms with the component “peacock”, which have the same meaning and the same internal form. This is an idiom with semantics that reflects the cognitive attribute “human character”: the English idiom (as) proud as a peacock and the Russian idiom “gordyi kak pavlin”. These idioms denote a very arrogant person. The expression goes back to Ovid’s work “Metamorphoses”. In the internal form of the idiom, the component “proud” corresponds to the qualitative code of culture, the component “peacock” relates to the zoomorphic code of culture. The figurative basis of the expression is the reference idea of a haughty person.

The English and Russian idioms with the component “peacock” also have different meaning. So, in English, idioms with the component “peacock” have semantics that reflect the following cognitive attributes:

- 1) behaviour pattern of a person (play the peacock, strut like a peacock);

2) a duded-up, overdressed person (as gaudy as a peacock).

We consider the English idiom with meaning that reflects the cognitive attribute “behaviour pattern of a person”. The idiom “play the peacock” means “to be arrogant”. In the internal form of the idiom, the component “play” corresponds to the action code of culture, the component “peacock” relates to the zoomorphic code of culture. The figurative basis of the expression is a reference idea of a pompous person and his arrogant overbearing.

Let us examine the English idiom with the meaning reflecting the cognitive attribute “a duded-up, overdressed person”. The idiom “(as) gaudy as a peacock” means a duded-up person, dressed to the nines. The component “gaudy” corresponds to the color code of the culture, and the component “peacock” refers to the zoomorphic code of the culture. The idiom goes back to the ancient mythological form of world awareness which is called animistic form, that is, to the personification of the zoomorphic world: the image is based on the comparison of “bird – man”. The image is created by a zoomorphic metaphor, in other words, the likeness of a peacock, having a fine feathering of various colors, and a person dressed up. The idiom is based on a reference idea of a decked out person.

Now we turn to the Russian idioms with the component “peacock”, which have meaning reflecting the cognitive attribute “inability to identify oneself as belonging to a particular group”, for example: neither a peacock, nor a crow, a crow in peacock feathers. These idioms denote someone who, according to his views, has shifted away from some people and has not taken sides. The components of the idioms “peacock-hen”, “crow” refer to the zoomorphic code of culture. The Russian idiom contains a negative particle “neither nor”, indicating that the person does not identify himself with a particular society.

4 Conclusions

The analysis shows that in English and Russian the idioms with the component “swallow” coincide with the semantics reflecting the cognitive criterion “the impossibility of generalizing something based on just one fact”. English idioms with this component, which have different meaning compared to Russian ones, were not identified.

The internal form of the Russian idioms includes a reference idea of the harbinger of spring, it contains a symbol of some event or phenomenon that later became widespread, and dates back to the traditions of the Slavic peoples, as well as to literary sources. The components of the internal form correspond to the zoomorphic and numerical cultural codes.

In English and Russian, the idioms with the component “peacock” coincide with the meaning reflecting the cognitive attribute “human character”.

The internal form of the English idiom contains reference ideas about the obnoxious behavior of a pompous person and stereotypical ideas about a person dressed up to the nines and components that correspond to the zoomorphic, qualitative and color codes of culture. These ideas date back to ancient Roman traditions in which the peacock symbolizes superiority and greatness.

The internal form of the Russian idiom with the component “peacock” contains a stereotypical idea of a person who has shifted away from some people and has not taken sides and components that correspond to zoomorphic and somatic cultural codes. The internal form goes back to the ideas of the peacock as a bird that only a wealthy person could afford. All the qualities that were hated in the nobleman were transferred to the “nobleman’s bird”. This explains the fact that in Russia the peacock is a symbol of arrogance, complacency and pride.

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