



SOURCES OF ENGLISH IDIOMS

Ruziboyev Quvonchbek Ergash o'g'li
Student of Master's Degree

Begizova Madina Karimovna
Scientific Advisor: Senior Teacher
Uzbekistan State World Languages University, Uzbekistan

Abstract:

The article is devoted to the study of etymology of English idioms. As a result of analysis of phraseological dictionaries, the following sources of their formation were identified: historical facts, traditions, legends, literary quotations, professional expressions, shortening of proverbs to a certain part, borrowings and many other ways.

Key words: Etymology, idiom, native idiom, borrowed idiom, Shakespearianism.

Phraseology is a part of linguistics which studies the most expressive part of the language's vocabulary coming from the very depths of popular speech. This part includes variable word groups; their ambiguousness finds its reflection in such terms as phraseological units, set phrases, idioms, word equivalents; this, in turn, underlines the divergent views concerning the nature and essential features of phraseological units. But no matter how the expressive means are called, there is always some reason why they came into being.

Taking into account the origin of phraseological units A.V. Kunin classified them into native, borrowed from other languages and borrowed from the American English. Native idioms as well as borrowed idioms can be connected with habits, traditions, customs, historical facts. As for the concrete sources of occurrence of phraseological units, they can be different. It can be idioms connected with ancient times. For example, a hint at a historical situation or a forgotten custom is observed in the idiom **to burn one's boats** = to prevent the possibility of retreat, indicates the custom of some generals of the past who, landing their army on the shore, ordered to burn ships so as to exclude the possibility of retreat; another example related to tradition is **to bury the hatchet** = to make peace; this language unit goes back to the custom of the North American Indians to bury the tomahawk (battle ax) when concluding peace; **to cut somebody off with a shilling** - deprive someone of an inheritance. There are many other phraseological units that have a historical origin and it is these units that





necessarily require comments when studying English by foreigners. Here are some more of them: **by hook or by crook** = using any means possible. It was the custom of the "good old England" innkeepers to drag customers towards them, grabbing them with hooks. Women were picked up by the dresses with sharp hooks, and men right by the leg with large hooks. And two more custom - oriented idioms: **win one's spurs** = to show one's true ability or courage for the first time, to gain fame; it was related to the custom of awarding knights with a pair of golden spurs when a man was made a knight; **to be out for scalps** = to be belligerent or highly critical; this idiom, like the previous one also comes from the custom in the military sphere, spread among the Indian tribes of North America, according to which, as a battle trophy, they removed the skin from the head of a killed enemy.

b) The Bible is also one of the main sources of creation of phraseological units: **the salt of the earth** = someone who is very dependable, honest; **forbidden fruit** = any sinful pleasure; **prodigal son** = a wastrel son who was welcomed back warmly on his homecoming in repentance; **not to let one's left hand know what one's right hand does** = one part of an organization or group does not know what another part of the same organization is doing and because of this difficulties arise; **a Juda's kiss** = a treacherous kiss, etc.

One more source from which idioms can take their origin is literature including literary quotations: for example, **to make a cat's paw of** = make (someone) your tool - from a fable about a monkey that made a cat get roasted chestnuts out of the fire; **brevity is the soul of wit** (Shakespeare); some more examples of Shakespearianisms are: **as good as one's word** (The Twelfth Night); **to make assurance double sure** (Macbeth); **a marriage of true minds** (Sonnet); **to out-Herod Herod** = to be even more cruel, wicked, etc., than the most wicked character imaginable (Hamlet), etc.

c) Apart from the above mentioned sources, idioms can also appear due to the literal or word for word translation of some unit taken from another language: **the apple of discord** (from Greek language); **to wash one's hands of (something)** = (from Greek); **to make two bites of a cherry** = to delay work (from French);

d) Various professional expressions, as well as expressions related to different entertainment, games, sports, etc., for example: **to put the finishing touches** - a professional expression of artists, **to feel one's pulse or intentions** - from a medical expression, the direct meaning of which is "feel the pulse", **to have a ball at one's feet** = to be the master of the situation, the expression of football players, the direct meaning of which is "to have the ball at the feet", **to have all the trumps in**



one's hand, expression of card players, **between wind and water** = in a dangerous place, expression of sailors, etc.

Phraseological units also include proverbs, which represent a special type of phraseological units. Proverbs have their own characteristic features that distinguish them from other phraseological units: in their construction, proverbs represent a complete syntactic whole. In some cases, a part of a proverb can develop into an independent phraseological unit and give a new formation, sometimes with a slightly changed meaning. So, the proverb: **birds of a feather flock together** (literally, birds of the same plumage are kept together), gave birth to a new idiom **birds of a feather** with almost the same meaning. Excerpting of a phraseological unit can also take place on the basis of any larger unit. For example idiom **a hot potato**=a piece of information, person, etc, that is probably dangerous or difficult to deal with, was formed from the expression 'drop somebody or something like a hot potato'.

One of the common principles for the formation of phraseological units is comparison; the essential feature of their semantics is to compare quality, condition, action, etc. and in such cases, the conjunctions 'as' or 'like' are used: **as proud as a peacock**= pleased with what one thinks one is or has done; **as easy as a pie** = very easy. Phraseological units can be built on rhyming - **a friend in need is a friend indeed**; on alliterations: **bag and baggage**= all belongings, **safe and sound**= safe and unharmed. Some phraseological units are built on the principle of doubling synonyms: **really and truly** or antonyms: **give and take** =mutual concession. Their typical feature as is seen from the examples is the usage of 'and' or 'or'. It must be said that many of such phrases can not be reversed. Thus, phraseological units paired in their structure are created.

Another origin of English idioms is legends. **Peeping Tom** is an overly curious person. The expression is associated with the legend of Lady Godiva. Lady Godiva's husband, the cruel Earl of Mercia, overlaid the city of Coventry with an unbearable tax. Lady Godiva interceded for the citizens, but the count said that he would only abolish the tax on the condition that Lady Godiva dared to drive naked through the whole city at noon. She accepted this condition. Learning about her self-sacrifice the inhabitants of the city agreed at the appointed hour to close the shutters of all houses tightly. Lady Godiva rode through the empty streets. Only the tailor Tom began to peep through the crack, and he was immediately struck by blindness. In Coventry, there is still a city clock on which the shutters open at 12 o'clock and the head of a curious Tom looks out of them.

To conclude. a phraseological unit is a complex phenomenon with a number of important features, which can therefore be approached from different points of view.





And one of them is the study of etymological aspect of the targeted vocabulary section. As the analysis has shown there can be different reasons explaining to us why and how the given idiom appeared in the language. And upon learning the history of its creation, students can understand it better and, consequently, interpret it appropriately. So, learning origin of idioms is a necessary step not only on the way to its correct acquisition but its long-term retention as well.

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