Conceptual Integration Theory in Idiom Modifications

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Abbreviations, Symbols and Font Styles

ACT	a cognitive architecture: a theory for simulating and understanding human cognition
BNC	British National Corpus
e.g.	for example (Latin *exempli gratia*)
etc.	and other similar things, and the rest; and so on (Latin *et cetera)*
FEI(s)	fixed expression(s)
ICM(s)	idealized cognitive model(s)
i.e.	that is (Latin *id est*)
PU(s)	phraseological unit(s)
*	an example which is ungrammatical or unacceptable
underline	part of an example highlighted for attention
bold	highlighting in the text
italic	highlighted PU
SMALL CAPS	conceptual metaphors and metonymies

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1

Introduction

In this book we will try to throw more light on mechanisms of idiom modification. Previous studies of idiom modification have not suggested a consistent argument why only certain types of modifications are acceptable for a given idiom whilst others are not. Actually, previous studies have not provided a coherent answer to the question to what extent an idiom can be modified to retain the link with the original phraseological unit, so that recipients can recognize it as a modification of an established original. The main aim of this study is to analyse the extent to which vital relations and optimality principles at work in conceptual integration can account for mechanisms of idiom modification. We also aim to present an overview and analysis of previous studies of idioms and idiom modifications and give an overview and analysis of cognitive linguistic theories that can account for the mechanisms of idiom modifications.

Our main hypothesis is idiomatic expressions are variable, and their variations can be explained using the postulates of the Conceptual Integration Theory. Mechanisms of idiom modification have semantic, syntactic and pragmatic constraints. Constraints of modification mechanisms can be explained using vital relations and optimality principles that define relations within conceptual integration networks.

The theoretical framework for this study is the Conceptual Integration Theory, proposed by Fauconnier and Turner (1998, 2002), which aims to account for both linguistic and non-linguistic blends. Creating an integration network is the basis of this theory. Conceptual integration network consists of minimum two input spaces, one generic space and one blended space. Establishing mental spaces, connections between them and blended spaces gives us global insight, new meaning and human-scale understanding. Optimality principles, proposed by Fauconnier and Turner, clarify the relations within the conceptual integration network. These optimality principles are: integration, web, unpacking, topology, good reason, and metonymic tightening. According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002),

relations within the conceptual integration network are also regulated with a set of vital relations. They distinguish the following vital relations: change, identity, time, space, cause-effect, part–whole, representation, role, analogy, disanalogy, property, similarity, category, intentionality and uniqueness.

The method used in this study is corpus analysis. Vital relations and optimality principles are tested on selected modified linguistic expressions from the corpus to explain the mechanisms of idiom modification.

The corpus comprises selected examples of idiom modifications collected from magazines Time, The New Yorker, The Economist, National Geographic, Cosmopolitan, Marie Claire. 20 examples were collected from general reading and the electronic media. 15 examples were also taken from the British National Corpus. The reason for including such a limited number of idiom modifications from the BNC lies in the fact that some registers rich in idiom modifications are poorly represented in the BNC.[1]

1 Cf. Omazić (2003).

2

Phraseology

Phraseology is referred to as a subdiscipline of the linguistic system which studies structure, meaning and use of phraseological units. Gläser (1998: 125) defines a phraseological unit as 'a lexicalized, reproducible bilexemic or polylexemic word group in common use, which has relative syntactic and semantic stability, may be idiomatized, may carry connotations, and may have an emphatic or intensifying function in a text'.

The founder of modern research on phraseology is considered to be Swiss linguist Charles Bally. However, it was further developed by Vinogradov (1947), Amosova (1963), and Cherniusheva (1964). Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen (2005*a*: 30) point out that 'the beginning of the scientific research on phraseology in the framework of a consistent linguistic theory, i.e. "Meaning-Text-Theory", can be ascribed to Mel'čuk (1960)'.

Research on phraseology has awakened the curiosity of many researchers, mainly in Western Europe, but also in the USA. However, the most important works on phraseology were written in Russian, German and French, but because of the language barrier and the Iron Curtain they were not accessible to Anglo-American linguists.[1]

In the past twenty years the interest in phraseology has grown considerably. The semantic and syntactic properties of phraseological units were the field of interest of many linguists. Scholarly attention has also been focused on different approaches to the synchronic and diachronic description of phraseological units, their pragmatic function in discourse, and cross-linguistic differences.[2]

Cognitive linguistics and phraseology are inseparable. Idioms present one of the strongest links between phraseology and cognitive linguistics. This claim is based on the fact that idioms present the central problem in phraseological analysis and we are aware

1 Cf. Cowie (1998).
2 Cf. Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen (2005*a*).

that idioms cannot be separated from our conceptual system. The meaning of idioms is far from being arbitrary, it is highly motivated. Motivation is a cognitive mechanism that connects domains of knowledge to idiomatic meanings. Cognitive mechanisms, metaphor, metonymy and conventional knowledge make the meaning of idioms motivated. Many cognitive linguists studied idioms and their behaviour: Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Lakoff (1987), Gibbs (1985, 1986, 1989, 1994, 1995), Taylor (2002, 2003), Ortony (1993), Kövecses (1986, 2000, 2002, 2005), Kövecses and Szábo (1996), Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen (2005), Omazić (2004, 2005*a*, 2005*b*) Langlotz (2006), Buljan (2002), Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić (2007).