

Specifics of phraseological units functioning in English public discourse on the material of Youtube platform

By

Karina A. Bashkirova

Department of Theory and Practice of Teaching Foreign Languages, Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication, Kazan Federal University, 2 Tatarstan str., Kazan, 420021, Russian Federation Scopus

Igor O. Gurianov

Department of Romance and Germanic Department, Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication, Kazan Federal University, Russian Federation, Scopus

Radif R. Zamaletdinov

Department of General Linguistics and Turkology, Institute of Philology and Intercultural Communication, Kazan Federal University, Russian Federation, Scopus

Natasha Anthony

Hudson Valley Community College, Troy, New York,
Scopus ID: 35973416800

Abstract

Discourse is one of the most understudied area in linguistics. It has a specific meaning and function in various areas of science, in linguistics there are three models of correlation in discourse and text. The main research problem of discourse is the absence of strict borders between different types of discourse. We single out public discourse as one of the broadest types of discourse the main feature of it is the coverage of the audience. Considering this feature of the public discourse we took the material of study from the biggest video hosting platform Youtube. Phraseological units are sophisticated lexical components of any language that have semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic functions. This article is an attempt to make a quantitative analysis of phraseological units that belong to different stylistic layers (formal and informal) and the way they are used in public discourse. Quantitative analysis allowed researchers to describe a distribution of phraseological units in topical areas.

Keywords: public discourse, quantitative analysis, formal idioms, informal idioms, phraseological image

Introduction

The use of the term discourse has been spread across various branches of science. The term discourse is used in various areas such as political studies, psychology, sociology, media studies etc.

In linguistics discourse has a specific meaning and function since the form of

discourse is determined by the language as the means of representation. Linguists face the difficulty of tracing correlation between discourse and text.

At the current stage we observe three models of correlation between discourse and text:

- Text is not equal to discourse
- Text is equal to discourse
- Text and discourse are interdependent (Krasnykh & Izotov, 2004)

Our team supports the position of interdependence of text and discourse. Text is an indivisible part of the discourse which acts as plane of expression. Though discourse includes the communicative situation and intentions of the participants of the situation that might be united under the umbrella term of the extralingual factors.

V.V. Krasnykh offers narrow and broad approach to the discourse. Narrow approach limits discourse to speech-communication activity without any implicit idea. Broad approach: “Discourse is a reflection of communicative activities and potential of a linguistics personality, as a system of communication” (Krasnykh & Izotov, 2004)

In contemporary discourse studies we witness a great amount of interdisciplinary works aimed at clarification of discourse borders.

Our study is an attempt to investigate the way phraseological units’ function in modern public discourse from linguistic point of view. Since phraseological units are one of the most complex lexical units that have multilayer paradigmatic relations: “Phraseological units is one of the sources of vocabulary enlargement and enrichment” (Yarullina et al., 2019). Kazan linguistic school has made a great contribution to the studies of different aspects of phraseological units functioning in different languages such as peculiarities of transformations and occasional use of idioms, modelling of phraseological units’ transformations, cognitive aspect of phraseological units processing. By coordinated work of scholars of KFU: “the meaning of phraseological euphemism was clarified” (Davletbayeva Diana et al., 2016). Idioms play a sophisticated role in functioning and modification of the vocabulary of any language. A great attention is paid by scholars of Kazan linguistic school to study of phraseological units in “piece of literature in the original language, as well as in the language of translation” (Gololobova et al., 2019).

We may draw parallels between phenomenon of discourse and phraseological units. They are complex linguistic phenomenon that has semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic functions. PU has no objective modality within the borders of text, as well we trace cultural and historical layer of lexicon in the semantics of phraseological units. In teaching of foreign language, the study of idioms plays a great role both in online and offline learning resources (Amirkhanova Karina et al., 2017). By the study of phraseological units, we witness relevant philosophical aspects that they express in the process of learning foreign

language (Sadykova Aida et al., 2018).

The borders of phraseological units are still not distinguished as some researchers include sayings and cliched phrases to the layer of phraseology, since others do not include transformed phraseological units.

Thus, the study of phraseological units functioning in contemporary public discourse contribute to the study of lexical and pragmatic clarification of phraseological models.

Research Methods

Statistic computation was used to count the number of uses of each phraseological on Youtube. It is one of the most widespread and multi-topical platforms that may reflect the current state of public discourse. Statistical analysis provides us with the quantitative qualities of the use of every phraseological unit in public discourse. We used the instrument Youglish – an application that helps to search for linguistic units in the videos published on Youtube.

Method of decoding stylitsic analysis of discourse that allowed us to distinguish main areas of reality reflected in public discourse of Youtube as well as to make categories of use of phraseological units not just in the context, but in the discourse. We pointed out the following topical areas: educational videos, historical videos, scientific, political, geographical, art, entertainment, news, motivational videos, public speech, popular science, steaming, sport, documentary, interview, TED videos and Google Talk.

Method of stylistic differentiation of phraseological units was used to formulate the hypothesis of research: phraseological units of informal style should be more frequently used in the entertaining videos or in the dialogues, while formal phraseological units should be more frequently used in public speeches or the speech of politicians.

Etymological analysis that is based on tracing the use of idioms in diachronic perspective that allows to state the original stylistic register of idioms use.

Results and Discussion

We took randomly 20 phraseological units (10 formal units and 10 informal literary units) that belong to 2 main stylistic layers according to the online phraseological dictionary. Total number of formal literary phraseological units' use was 5386 inputs while informal phraseological units were use 4438 times. Total correlation of unit was 55% formal and 45% of informal units respectively. We have analysed contextual use of 24% of chosen units. It allows us to make statistically relevant assumptions about the stylistic distribution of these units in public discourse.

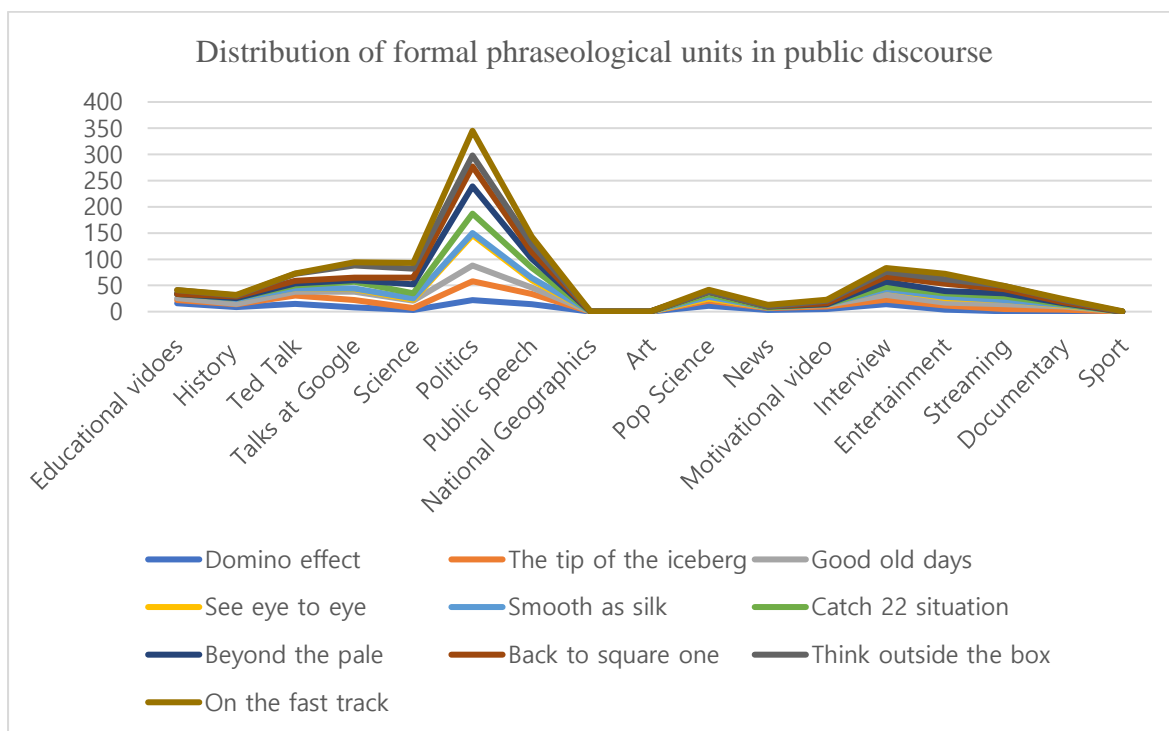


Fig. 2. Distribution of formal phraseological units

Statistical analysis of formal phraseological units demonstrates the dominant use in public speech cluster and politics. This fact proves that formal phraseological units in public discourse tend to be used in speech of officials or public speakers. Three units “Domino effect”, “See eye to eye” and “On the fast track” are the most frequently used in this cluster. These two units have completely different etymology and origin. Domino effect “was first used in 1950ies in American political discourse. It has a clear and understandable image of the row of dominoes which if fallen cause a chain reaction”. (Farlex Partner Idioms Dictionary. Farlex 2017).

Whilst see eye to eye belongs to biblical layer of phraseology and became a part of cultural realia of Western world. These idioms are used as well in Ted Talk and Google Talk popular platforms where professionals share their expertise with the audience, the time of presentation is limited. Thus, speakers must use quite vivid and understandable metaphors that underlie in the cores of chosen phraseological units.

The origins of the idiom “On the fast track” can be traced back to 1965 article in New York Times magazine where it was first used by Richard Nixon and it means exciting, competitive lifestyle. This unit is attributed to formal style, more specifically used in political functional style, as it was introduced by the President of the US and today it is considered to be a cliched phrase (American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition. Copyright 2016 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company).

In the middle of the graph, we observe an idiom “Back to square one”. It was first used by the British sportcasters in 1930ies. The image that underlies in this idioms comes from a board game and helps radio listeners to follow the movement of football players, since the pitch was split into squares to create a clear image of players’ location. After WWII this idiom was broadly used in American newspaper discourse.

The idiom “beyond the pale” dates back to 1547 to the term Pale in Ireland which meant various territories under English control. The earliest meaning of the phrase meant uncivilised and dangerous for the English. Nowadays the meaning transformed to more general expression denoting socially unacceptable behaviour. This unit was used as well in scientific lectures and public speeches that moves this idiom over the boundaries of political discourse (Farlex Partner Idioms Dictionary. Farlex 2017).

The idiom “think outside the box” is considered to be informal by Farlex Partner Idioms Dictionary (Farlex Partner Idioms Dictionary. Farlex 2017). However, we noticed that its usage was restricted by more formal usage such as public speeches, politics, and science. The peak of this idiom usage was traced in Talks at google cluster, which is a platform for creative thinkers who discuss breakthrough technologies and solutions at this platform. The image of this idiom is based on the figurative box that should not limit your thinking.

On the contrary such unit as “smooth as silk” which originates from 1910 story by O. Henry despite clearness of metaphorization based on the simile is rarely used in public speech and politics as well as in Ted Talk and Google Talk. It might relate to high-flown rhetoric attribution of this unit which is improper in public speaking as it may sound out of line or artificial to the context (American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition. Copyright 2016 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company).

Phraseological units of formal style were barely used in spheres of geography, sport, art and news as these clusters require short and compressed way of providing information. Thus, they tend to use cliched structures and neutral style where the use of such units would be inappropriate.

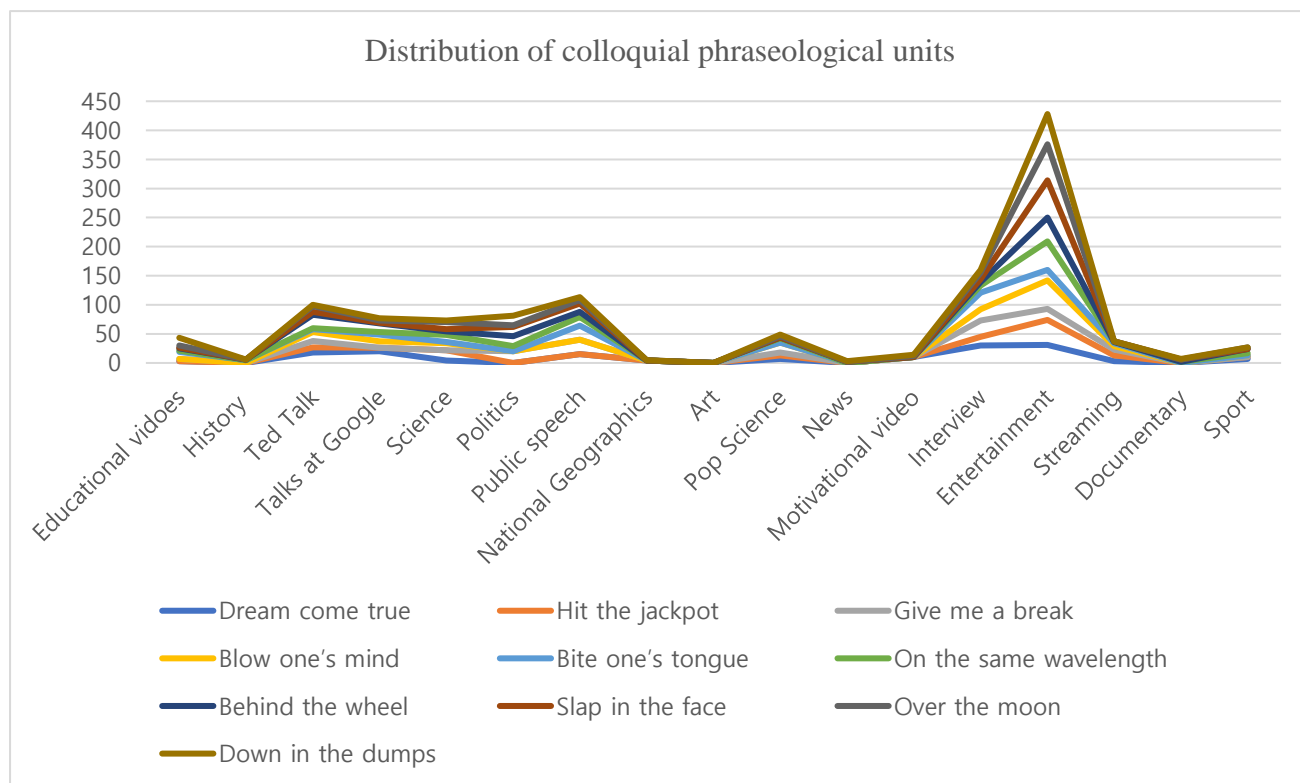


Fig. 2. Distribution of colloquial phraseological units

Statistical analysis of informal phraseological units demonstrates the dominant use in the clusters of Interview and Entertainment spheres. The most frequently used unit of informal

layer were blow one's mind, bite one's tongue, down in the dumps, slap in the face, over the moon.

The origins of blow one's mind date back to mid 1960ies and hippie cultural movement, its meaning evolved and neutralised from having a drug induced experience to being astonished in 2000s. The register of this unit is closer to slang (Farlex Partner Idioms Dictionary. Farlex 2017).

While bite one's tongue is a Shakespearism first used in Henry VI with the meaning to stop oneself from saying something offensive or inappropriate. Today its usage is colloquial and has a humorous imperative (American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition. Copyright 2016 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company). We observe the use of these phrases in interviews and entertainment areas of Youtube where speakers perform spontaneous utterances, thus colloquial expressions are more suitable in these contexts. These units comprise an extensive meaning in a succinct phrase that may cause comic effect, sometimes these phrases can serve as identifiers of trust between the speakers as they reduce tension in the conversation.

The notion of the idiom "Down in the dumps" can be traced back to early 1500 when the noun "dumps" meant a state of depression, a sense of which survived only in this expression, and it is not used otherwise (American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition. Copyright 2016 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company). It has been used more frequently in two opposite areas politics and entertainment. Thus, we observe flexibility of the borders between the layers of usage.

The use of the phrase "slap in the face" dates back to 1800 when it referred to a literal slap, that was an offensive action towards nobility and may have led to prosecution by law (Farlex Partner Idioms Dictionary. Farlex 2017). Now this idiom is used mainly as an action of insult or upsetting remark, but not a physical action. It belongs to public speech and entertaining cluster of discourse.

"Over the moon" in the meaning of extremely happy comes from an old British lullaby that included this line. Despite having an obvious colloquial register its usage was not restricted only to entertainment cluster, but also it was used in scientific cluster of public discourse and in TED talk.

The least frequently used unit was dream come true. This might be explained by the process of transformation that this unit undergo. Initially it was used in colloquial speech, but according to Collins dictionary it tends to be used mostly in newspaper functional style and it loses its colloquiality and becomes cliched.

Summary

The analysis of the use of formal and informal phraseological units shows similar stylistic distribution prevails in public discourse of Youtube. Informal units are used mostly in spontaneous speech such as interview where the use of formal phraseological units is not suitable stylistically.

Nevertheless 9 out of 10 chosen idioms of informal style were met in science cluster, 6 out of 10 were used in politics and all 10 informal units were found in TED talk videos. Though the quantity of usage of informal idioms in the clusters were 10% less than formal. That

demonstrates dynamics processes those idioms undergo while used in public discourse.

This process leads to the loss of clear stylistic register of those idioms and make stylistically neutral or even formal. As it happened with the idiom “behind the wheel” and “dream come true” they were equally frequent in both spheres of entertainment and politics.

Stylistic ranking does not limit the use of such idioms in different clusters. That is the peculiarity of public discourse, especially on Youtube platform where speakers must use metaphors that are easy to imagine and remember. Thus, the flexibility of borders between the topical clusters of public discourse allows idioms to change the area of use.

Formal phraseological units are used mostly by public speakers, this is explained by the high demand in clear and well-known metaphors that can be easily recognized by speakers.

In “TED talk” and “Talks at Google” we do not observe the strict boundaries between usage of either formal or informal idioms that is proved by equipollent distribution of all 20 units under study.

Conclusion

Public discourse is a vast phenomenon of language which has unique features such as the ability to address to a great number of people, it combines monologues and dialogues, and it can be split into various thematic clusters that may overlap with different types of discourse. Stylistic reflection of culture origins of any language is encapsulated in phraseological layer of lexicon (Troshina, 2017). Such platforms as Youtube provide us with a great amount of content aimed at large audience, thus it represents form and function the most applicable for distribution of information.

Differentiation of discourse into different layers is an abstraction to a certain extent since borders between these layers are quite ambiguous (Arutyunova, 1998). Phraseological units that function in public discourse undergo certain stylistic transformations. Initial meaning provided by the dictionaries alters greatly used in the context of different spheres. Based on processed material we may state that initial stylistic attribution of formal and informal phraseological units is altered by the contextual use in public discourse.

Acknowledgements

«This paper is performed as part of the implementation of the Kazan Federal University Strategic Academic Leadership Program».

References

- American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition. Copyright 2016 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.
- Amirkhanova Karina M., Harkova Elena V., Palutina Olga G., Teaching English grammar through distance learning resources: case study of Kazan Federal University//inted2017: 11th international technology, education and development conference. - 2017. - Vol., Is.. - P.2705-2710.
- Arutyunova, N.D. Discourse / N.D. Arutyunova // Big encyclopedic dictionary. Linguistics– - M., 1998. - pp. 136-137.

- Davletbayeva Diana, Arsenteva Elena, Ayupova Roza, Contextual use of phraseological euphemisms: component addition//Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods. - 2016. - Vol., Is.. - P.159-163.
- Farlex Partner Idioms Dictionary. Farlex 2017
- Gololobova N.I, Arsenteva E.F, Zelenicka E., Author's transformations and their translation in «the plumed serpent» by D.H. Lawrence//International Journal of Innovative Technology and Exploring Engineering. - 2019. - Vol.9, Is.1. - P.5101-5104.
- Language, consciousness, communication: Collection of articles / Ed. V. V. Krasnykh, A. I. Izotov. Moscow: MAKS Press, 2004. Issue. 26. 168 p. ISBN 5-317-00981-2, 24-32
- N.N. Troshina Stylistic system of culture and public discourse in the conditions of sociocultural transformation of society Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences Moscow, Russia, 2017 pp. 201 - 213
- Sadykova Aida G., Shafigullina Liliya Sh., Aleeva Gulnara H., Cultural And Philosophical Aspects Of Using Phraseological Units In Teaching Process//MODERN JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS. - 2018. - Vol.8, Is.6. - P.208-214.
- Yarullina, O.A., Tarasova, F.H., Varlamova, E.V., Polhovskaya, E.V. Evaluation component in the phraseological units of the English and Tatar languages // Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics. - 2019. - 10(Special Issue). - Pp. 1132–1138.