

Precedent Expressions in English Newspaper Headlines

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Abstract

Any language learner at any level of his learning involuntarily comes across encrypted clichés, phrases and stereotyped expressions, the meaning of which cannot be deciphered without special background knowledge about the culture of the people – the native speakers. In this regard, the relevance of the study of precedent expressions in the context of newspaper headlines is obvious. Research objectives: 1) to reveal the semantic features of precedent expressions in newspaper headlines, 2) to identify the linguistic cultural components of precedent expressions in the context in the English-language newspaper headlines. The research is based on the following methods: semantization, contextual analysis. The study hypothesized that the study of precedent statements contributes to a more complete understanding of the material of a newspaper article, achieving the goal of explaining an encrypted phrase or statement in context.

Keywords: Precedent Expression (PE); Precedent Phenomenon (PF); Precedent Situation (PS); Linguistic and Cultural Studies; Cognitive Structure.

Introduction

“Thesis of the famous Russian linguist G.O. Vinokur that “every linguist who studies a language <...> will certainly become a researcher of the culture, the products of which the language he has chosen belongs to” is convincingly confirmed by the entire history of linguistic thought, starting from the time when linguistics became an independent field of scientific research” (Khrolenko, 2005).

It is no coincidence that scientists are interested in a relatively new direction in linguistics “linguistic cultural studies is a science that emerged at the intersection of linguistics and cultural studies and studies the manifestations of the culture of the people, which are reflected and entrenched in the language” (Maslova, 2004). In-depth analysis and certain developments in this area have generated new research products, among which precedent phenomena have taken a special place as units of reflection of the relationship between "language and culture". But in this work, neither “linguistic cultural studies” in general as a science is of interest; but only some of its aspects, namely, the phenomena that in linguistics

are determined by precedent.

The “precedent” concept has always been characteristic of the field of law. There it is interpreted in the controversial ‘was - was not’. However, more and more often this term visits the spheres of language and culture, where it is understood as a phenomenon of a primary sample, set for evaluation or comparison, so that a phenomenon is created a second time due to the reliance on the sample that already existed.

The Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture gives the following interpretation of the term “precedent” – it is “an action or incident that took place earlier and serves as an example or justification for subsequent cases of this kind” (Murphy, 2005). From this definition, D. B. Gudkov emphasizes that a precedent is a fact (in the broadest sense of the word), has exemplary (serves as a standard, an example) and imperative (on its basis, subsequent actions should be modeled). Thus, precedents in the broad sense of this word can include exemplary facts presented in speech by certain verbal signals that actualize standard content that is not created anew, but reproduced (for example, language clichés and stamps of different levels, stereotypes, frame structures etc.) (Gudkov, 2003).

The following scientists made the research of precedency in linguistics: (Abdykhanova, Zhakupov, Jambayeva, Syzdykova, Yespekova, Seiitova, Adylbekova & Ahmuldinova, 2018; Baltyreva & Esenova, 2013; Bortha & Mills, 2012; Dmitrieva & Golomidova, 2020; Dyer, 2008; Gudkov, 1998, 2003; Gudkov, Krasnykh, Zakharenko, & Bagaeva, 1997; Ilyushkina, M. & Vershinina, 2018; Karasik, 2002; Karaulov, 1987; Kazantseva & Hasan, 2019; Khayyat & Khayyat, 2016; Khuzin, 2020; Kochneva, 2018; Murtazina, Boykova, Berdysheva & Golokova, 2019; Nakhimova, 2018; Permyakova & Burakova, 2020; Raspaeva, 2017; Shumakova, 2019; Suprun, 1995; Velykoroda, 2019) and others.

Methods

In this paper such theoretical methods have been used: descriptive method including observation, semantization (Achaeva et al., 2018), contextual analysis, generalization and method of simultaneous analysis of linguistic facts.

Observation involves observing and collecting data about an activity: what happens, what the object of research does, or how it works. Visual observation: you use your own eyes, perhaps helped by a camera or other recording tool.

Descriptive observation suggests that you do not want to alter the operation in any way; you only want to register it without your intervention as it will take place.

Results and Discussion

For the first time, the definition of the precedent text was given by Yu. N. Karaulov in 1986, which probably served as an impetus for further research in this direction. It was followed by the introduction of the concepts of a precedent statement (Kostomarov & Burvikova, 1994), a precedent

name (Gudkov, 1998), a precedent phenomenon and a precedent situation (Gudkov et al., 1997).

According to V.V. Krasnykh “the precedent are the following phenomena:

- 1) well known to all representatives of the national-linguistic-cultural community (“having a super-personal character”); the precedent phenomenon “is well known to all representatives ...” insofar as the latter know (at least) about its existence and have a certain, common, obligatory for all carriers of this mental-lingual complex, nationally determined, minimized invariant of its perception;
- 2) relevant in the cognitive and emotional terms; behind a precedent phenomenon there is always a certain idea of it, common and obligatory for all carriers of this or that national-cultural mentality, or an invariant of its perception, which makes all appeals to the precedent phenomenon “transparent”, understandable, connotatively colored;
- 3) the appeal to which is constantly renewed in the speech of representatives of one or another national-linguistic-cultural community; speaking of a constant appeal to precedent phenomena (and this is one of the signs of the latter), we mean that the “renewability” of referring to one or another precedent phenomenon may be “potential”, that is, there may not be an appeal to it frequency, but in any case it will be clear to the interlocutor without additional decoding and commentary” (Krasnykh, 2002).

The concept behind the terms “national-lingual-cultural community” (or, according to D.B. Gudkov, “linguistic-cultural community” (LCS)) in many of its parameters approaches the concepts of “ethnos” and “nation”, the main feature denoted by these words, a group of people is the community of culture of the individuals included in it. At the same time, one of the main components of culture and, therefore, signs of ethnic differentiation is language. Gudkov uses the term linguistic and cultural community, not ethnos, since in this case the emphasis is not so much on the biological, genetic, and geographical aspects of such a community, which is associated with the concept of an ethnos in any understanding, but on the linguistic and cultural unity of its members (Gudkov, 2003). At the same time, V.V. Krasnykh proposes to distinguish between “society” and “national-linguistic-cultural community” according to the number of unifying differential features: if there is one feature (for example, generation, level of education, profession, hobby, confession, etc.), then we are dealing with society; if there are several features (for example, language, history, culture, etc.), then we are talking about a national-linguistic-cultural community (Krasnykh, 2002).

In other words, precedent phenomena are separate blocks of information that, by their appearance in a text or in speech, cause certain nationally-specific associations, common to members of a particular LCS. Representatives of other communities, however, may perceive such signals only superficially, and sometimes they may not be understood at all.

For example, in the headline “Kogo lechat Dumskiye Aibolity? (Whom do the Duma Aibolits treat?)” a reader who does not belong to the Russian LCS will not immediately be able to “grasp” the meaning of the content under the word (precedent name) “Aibolit”, which in the minds of the representatives of the Russian LCS was entrenched as a fictional hero of the children's story

by Korney Chukovsky Doctor Aibolit, ready to help anyone in need of medical help. The use of “Aibolit” in this title, of course, did not imply medical assistance, but most likely, on the contrary, was used to express a certain irony with the opposite connotation (Gudkov, 2003).

Or, for example, “James Bond v Rossii. Yevgeny Primakov – shpion, kotoryy sbezhal iz lesu. (James Bond in Russia. Yevgeny Primakov is a spy who returned from the forest)”. The “snubbing” of the spy’s appearance in this case is ensured by the precedent name of J. Bond (a fictional English spy from the books of Ian Fleming and numerous film adaptations of these books).

As mentioned above, the following PF are singled out: precedent text (PT), precedent expression (PE), precedent name (PI), precedent situation (PS).

Precedent expression (PE) is a reproduced product of speech-thinking activity, a complete and self-sufficient unit. Among the PE are quotes from texts of various nature (for example, “Elementary, Watson!”, “To be or not to be: that’s the question”), as well as proverbs (for example, “All is not gold that glitters”).

In terms of form (expression plan), PE can be represented: either with the entire source text (for example, small nursery rhymes); or some proper linguistic unit (word combination, sentence, phrase), built according to the laws of the language, but received the status of a precedent phenomenon. It can be argued that PE according to “formal indicators” is a phenomenon of its own linguistic nature, it is necessarily repeatedly reproduced in speech. There is always a precedent phenomenon behind a precedent statement – a precedent text and / or a precedent situation, which play an important role in the formation of the meaning of the expression (Krasnykh, 2002).

For example, “Vostok – delo dokhloe (The East is a Dead Business)” is the subtitle of the section of the article on the collapse of the USSR, which deals with the Central Asian republics. Here one can trace the “replacement” of the word for the well-known phrase “Vostok – delo tonkoe. (East is a delicate matter.)” (words of one of the characters in the movie “White Sun of the Desert”, director V. Motyl, produced in the USSR – 1969) (Walsh & Burkov, 2002). The deep meaning of the utterance – emphasizing that the situation is delicate, requiring knowledge and careful handling (not always in relation to the East) – is largely “removed” due to the use of a “low” word in the transformed PE, on which the main semantic load falls, in this way the author expresses his skepticism about the possibilities of any serious transformations in the Central Asian republics.

D.B. Gudkov proposes to classify PE according to the degree of their “distortion”:

- 1) canonical” PE; they act as a strict quote, not subject to change: “Zdes’ ptitsy ne poyut... (Birds don't sing here ...)”
- 2) transformed PE; they undergo certain changes, which are such that the PE is easily recognized and restored: “Oskolki razbitogo vdrebezgi, ob’edinyaytes’! (Fragments of the shattered to smithereens, unite!)” (on the adoption by the Duma of the law creating

the basis for the unification of the republics of the former USSR).

There is always a complex of cognitive structures behind precedent statements. V.V. Krasnykh defines a cognitive structure as a kind of "meaningful" (that is, having a certain content-meaning) form of encoding and storing information, in other words, it is an indivisible and indivisible cognitive unit that stores "collapsed" knowledge and / or representation. Phenomenological cognitive structures form a set of knowledge and ideas about phenomena of extralinguistic and linguistic proper, that is, about historical events, real personalities, laws of nature, works of art, including literary ones, etc. Linguistic cognitive structures underlie linguistic and speech competence, they form a body of knowledge and ideas about the laws of a language, about its syntactic structure, lexical stock, phonetic and phonological structure, about the laws of the functioning of its units and the construction of speech in a given language. When precedent expressions function in speech, both linguistic and phenomenological cognitive structures can be relevant, or only linguistic structures are activated (Krasnykh, 2002).

Let's give one more example:

“Luch sveta v temnom gosudarstve. (A ray of light in a dark state.)” – the title of an article on the course of economic reforms in Tatarstan. The title immediately makes it clear that the author of the article considers the transformations that are being carried out in this republic to be successful, which, in his opinion, distinguishes it favorably from other Russian territories. Despite the fact that the given PE instantly evokes in the minds of Russian speakers the idea of the article by N. A. Dobrolyubov (1860) and through it about the play by A. N. Ostrovsky "The Thunderstorm", these texts do not play a big role in the formation of the meaning of the title, and the direct, superficial meaning of the transformed PE comes to the fore.

Proverbs and sayings are also “material” for the formation of PE and are not the last in terms of the degree of use:

“Zakon ne vorobey – vzletit, ne popravish. (The law is not a sparrow – it will take off, you cannot correct it.)”.

From early childhood, proverbs and sayings are firmly anchored in the world of the speaker and reader. In a newspaper (as in speech), the use of a stereotypical, understandable to the interlocutor, sayings is a signal of belonging to a given society, connection with its culture and traditions. Like other clichés, proverbs and sayings are usually not used by journalists in their original form. Only by reworking the “source material” can a journalist directly realize the tasks of expressing vividness and evaluation, while avoiding the didacticity inherent in most proverbs and sayings.

Thus, PEs seem to be quite frequent phenomena in the speech of modern journalism, they can be "canonical" and transformational, giving the speech expressiveness and dynamics.

In our research precedent expressions were selected By the method of continuous sampling and text search from newspapers; their semantisation and contextual analysis were carried out.

“Treats or tricks” (Hello №686, 2001).

“Treat or trick” – “Treat, or we will teach you a lesson.” Tradition associated with the eve of All Saints' Day - Hallowe'en (October, 31), when children go from door to door and ask “Treat or trick”; if they are not given sweets or some money, they have the right to play a cruel joke, for example, to soap the windows (Tomakhin, 2003).

Interesting here is the use of a well-known phrase in the plural, which makes the statement more decorative. Perhaps it was used to emphasize the plurality of attributes of this holiday: masks, costumes, pumpkin, candles, treats, etc.

“In Gold we trust” (The Moscow News (MN), №40, 2004).

This heading traces the “coded” phrase known to any American – “In God we trust” (“We trust in God”), which, according to the definition of G.D. Tomakhin, means: 1. The motto of the United States of America (adopted by Congress in 1956; placed on US banknotes and coins); 2. Florida State Motto (Tomakhin, 2001).

The paraphrased national phrase has a password function, since the reader here must first decipher the known and compare it with the context, which reflects Russia's belief in gold more than in the dollar; in this connection, the use of the expression printed on every US banknote becomes clear here.

“...To raise or not to raise taxes?” that is the question ... from “VAT Reduction and Macroeconomics 101” (The Moscow News (MN), № 40, 2005).

Undoubtedly, this PE is a quasi-quote to the well-known Shakespearean phrase “to be or not to be: that’s the question” (Shakespeare. Hamlet, 1601). Used humorously before making a serious decision (Walsh & Burkov, 2002).

“Should we raise taxes or not?” addressed to the reader sounds ironic and defiant in the general economic picture of Russia. Perhaps the author used this PE to enhance the effect of doubt.

An identical effect is observed in other examples with the same PE, encrypted but easily recognizable:

“Spring water: to drink or not to drink?” (The Moscow News (MN), № 2, 2006).

“To watch or not to watch?” (The Moscow News (MN), № 3, 2006).

“Hotel Moskva: to blast or not to blast?” (The Moscow News (MN), № 38, 2002).

“Your money or your life?” (The Moscow News (MN), № 47, 2003).

“Your money or your life!” – a statement that has become a precedent thanks to the activities of robbers in the past (Murphy, 2005). The threat: "Give me your money or I will kill you" has survived to this day as one of the sides of everyday life.

Although this newspaper article does not mean a robbery attack, nevertheless, a threat to life is revealed in the course of a journalist’s investigation of the state and price of hospital beds for citizens of the Russian Federation. Ironically, the author "fixes" this expression for the article.

“SOS! English language in intensive care!” (The Moscow News (MN), № 17, 2006).

SOS is a distress signal calling for help to save a ship or plane (Murphy, 2005).

The article describes the increased interest in the English language in recent times. The alarm signal undoubtedly attracts the attention of the reader, gives brightness to the title.

“Water of life” for business class” (The Moscow News (MN), № 28, 2005).

In this example, you can see the paraphrased statement “Elixir of Life” – according to

the ideas of medieval alchemists, a drink that preserves eternal youth, gives immortality; as well as anything that gives strength, energy (Walsh & Burkov, 2002).

The “water of life” refers to cell therapy, which has been approved by the federal authorities. Of course, the availability of such treatment is limited by the patient's financial capabilities, as you can guess from the title. This PE is used to save language means.

“Elton and Yohji: love at first suit” (Hello №686, 2001).

In this heading of the article, there is a quasi-quote of the well-known phrase "love at first sight" aimed at the theme of fashion.

“Love at first sight” – an expression taken from the work of Christopher Marlowe (English poet and writer) "Hero and Leander", published in 1598 (Walsh & Burkov, 2002).

Fashion magazine article explores Elton John's interests. In this case, the replayed heading with the use of PE serves to impart expression and convey a part of the context at the stage of the first acquaintance with the reader.

Summary

After analyzing the actual material of the press, the composition of the studied vocabulary was determined, which includes 86 precedent expressions in English newspaper headlines. Among which: 29 universal precedent and 57 national precedent phenomena. Particularly frequent PEs were appealing to the expression «to be or not to be: that’s the question», which turned out to be still topical in today’s realia, reflecting doubt and uncertainty in society.

Carrying out the semantisation of these phenomena, we focused on defining the vocabulary portrait of these linguistic units, on their significance in terms of transferring the national-cultural component. As a result, it turned out that not all precedent phenomena are explicit, sometimes the reader needs to analyze the text, expression, situation or name in more detail, or, in another way, recognize, and then try to interpret it for a more adequate understanding of the message in the article.

At the stage of contextual analysis, an attempt was made to understand why the author found it necessary to use one or another PF for transmitting information, and what associations this interweaving of the PF with the text of the article can cause in the reader.

On the basis of the hypothesis put forward and tested by our research, it can be argued that the study of precedent expressions can contribute to the achievement of a more complete mutual understanding of two participants in a communicative act belonging to different cultures; since knowing the background of the encrypted phrase, phenomenon or name, the communication process becomes livelier, more voluminous and more colorful. From the perspective of this work, we found out that in order to understand these phenomena, it is

necessary to possess certain background knowledge, culturally marked and specific to a particular language. That is, one should, obviously, talk not only about linguistic and speech competencies as components of communicative competence, but also about the third component of the latter – about cultural competence, which is equally necessary for adequate communication of representatives of different national-linguistic and cultural communities.

Thus, the significance of the precedent expressions in intercultural communication is very high, since it not only ensures the mastery of new knowledge in the field of a foreign language, but also reveals the interaction of different languages in the traditions and culture of the countries that speak them.

Conclusions

It was found that PE can be used to decorate speech, give it light, convey irony, comedic effect, meanings that are negative by allegory for a communicative partner, and contribute to a laconic expression of thought in general. In the password ('encrypted') feature, there have also been instances of their usage.

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