IDIOMATICITY OF DERIVED LEXICAL UNITS

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Abstract: The existence of exception features, or idiomatic components, in the meanings of a great number of complex lexical expressions causes their idiosyncratic nature and results in their non-compositionality. The study of various parameters, the semantic - identifying or predicating - nature of bases and derivates being the most relevant, reveals a way to account for and to capture the idiomaticity of a derived unit by the derivation rule.

Key words: complex expression, motivation, idiomaticity, derivation rule, semantic ambiguity, intension, implication.

1. SEMANTIC IRREGULARITY WITHIN THE LEXICON

To describe systematic relations in language is no easy matter as every rule regardless of its generalization and productivity can be said to have some idiosyncratic properties which introduce limitations on the domain or the scope of the rule. Irregularity is most typical of lexical units making the lexicon "the repository of what is idiosyncratic and unpredictable about linguistic forms" (Anderson, 1985) and the difficulties of its adequate description in grammar almost proverbial. Neither the lexicalists with their idea of listing all the units in the lexicon nor the transformationalists in their attempt to work out lexical rules have yet found a key to how to capture both rule-governed and non-rule governed behaviour of language users and their ability to correctly decipher the meaning of complex lexical expressions: phrasal word combinations, complex words formed by various word formation processes and derived meanings of polysemantic words, on the one hand, or to comprehend lexical gaps and semantic differences of foreign language expressions, on the other.

The extent and nature of restrictions in the lexicon, the idiosyncratic character of a great many complex lexical units caused by the existence of exception features, or an idiomatic component, in their meanings, and the resulting non-compositionality of complex lexical expressions constitute the most important and serious impediment to a generative treatment of derivational processes and the lexicon. Studies of phonological, etymological, morphemic, semantic, pragmatic, etc. properties of the input classes which have been carried out since ancient times and resulted in detailed and thorough descriptions of distributional properties of lexical rules within

idiomatic phraseology, word formation and semantic derivation lexical subsystems (the list of even most recent publications will make a volumes-long bibliography) have made it explicit how unpredictable the input of lexical rules might be, how diffuse the rule boundaries are and how specific is the semantic reading of a derivate. (We put aside creations like *girlnapping* in English based on analogy with *kidnapping* or *голеадор* in Russian built on analogy with *тореадор*). It's a well-established fact, e.g., that names of parts of the body and names of animals (fauna names) constitute the major classes of phraseological units in English and in Russian. But within these lexico-semantic groups some lexemes happen to be phraseologically very productive (*hand, eye, heart; dog, cat , horse; bird, herring* in English, *волк* 'wolf', *собака* 'dog', *конь* 'horse'; *ворона* 'crow', *рыба* 'fish', *щука* 'pike' in Russian), while others *(lung, kidney; bison, panther, lynx; carp* , etc. in English and their correlates in Russian) are phraseologically passive enough or non-productive at all. More than 50% of names of parts of the body and more than 70% of names of animals in English happen to be phraseologically empty. The correlation between etymological, structural, stylistic, frequency, systemic and other parameters of a lexeme treated as a cluster and its phraseological activity seems to be only tentative. It seems noteworthy, that both in English and in Russian, though to a different degree, phraseologically active words form paradigmatic sets of the type *bull - cow – calf, horse - mare - colt, cock - hen - chicken, pig – hog – sow – swine* in English or *овца* 'sheep', *овечка* 'little sheep', *баран* 'ram', *ягненок* 'lamb'; *лошадь* 'horse', *лошадка* 'little horse', *конь* ' horse, steed', *жеребчик* 'colt', *жеребец* 'stallion', *кобыла* 'mare', *кобылка* 'young mare, filly', *пегас* ' a horse of piebald colour', *вороной* ' a horse of black colour', *мерин* 'gelding' in which the differentiating features «Male: Female», « Adult: Young» are of paramount importance. (In Russian we should also add an endearing term to the majority of suchlike paradigms). Another example can be the formation of derivates *carful, stockingful* in which the semantic features of "a vehicle" or "a piece of clothing" get repressed or suspended while the latent feature of "a container' has become activated. And though "it appears a normal state of affairs in language for an item to have semantic features *a,b,...n* such that in one use feature *a* is activated with *b* suspended or repressed, while in another use *b* is activated and *a* suspended" (Kempson and Quirk, 1971), to predict the behaviour of semantic features, especially the activation of the latent ones which turn out to be relevant in derivation processes is next to impossible.

But most baffling and evasive are the rules of semantic reading of complex lexical units. Following the law of institutionalization, or hypostatization (Lipka, 1977), undergoing various semantic shifts, changing their meaning under the influence of pragmatic factors and contextual usage, complex lexical units tend to form a heterogeneous scale. One end of the scale is constituted by transparent, fully motivated complex units which keep their motivated character over the years vividly demonstrating their resistance to demotivation, lack of absolute arbitrariness of the lexicon and the significance of motivation for the knowledge and use of language. For many derivational patterns, especially those which aim at transposition of units from one category into another or semantic modification (e.g. zero derived nouns and suffixal adjectives in English) they make up an overwhelming majority. Motivation and transparency are also characteristic of a great number of complex terminological names. The other extreme of the scale is formed by structurally complex expressions the complete idiomatization of which turns them into simplexes with an idiosyncratic meaning and thus into listed items of the lexicon, idiomatic phraseological units

playing the dominant role among them.

Problems of semantic reading are posed mainly by the intermediary class of derivates the meaning of which contains an irregular semantic component and therefore is not quite built in a compositional way. To classify the lexical information carried by these complexes as opaque, purely arbitrary and unanalyzable seems to us too pessimistic and fruitless a view. The history of sciences (physics and linguistics among them) gives a lot of examples when irregularity happens to be a manifestation of another regularity though of a different kind or on a different level.

2. IDIOMATIC COMPONENTS IN THE SEMANTICS OF DERIVED WORDS

Our search for semantic regularities in the realm of idiomatic components and the study of various parameters: lexico-grammatic and lexico-semantic properties of underlying bases, motivating semantic structures, semantic shifts and others relevant to the development of idiomaticity within meanings of derived words have revealed a crucial role the distinction between rigid designators and predicating words plays in word formation processes. In derived words which have an identifying character the idiomatic component usually constitutes the intension of the word, determines its categorial and subcategorial properties and reference causing the word to become finally item-familiar. The lexical domains to which words of this type belong (animals, plants, artefacts, etc.) cannot be programmed by the semantic features of the underlying bases which indicate as a rule some property or relationship generally implied or associated with the designated objects (e.g. *whiting* 'a kind of fish', *greening* 'a kind of apple' in English; *вьюнок* 'a kind of plant', *змеевик* 'a kind of pipe', *зеленка* 'a kind of mushroom' in Russian). As the property or relationship can be shared by and thus be predicated to many objects, the underlying base is often used in derivation several times with semantic ambiguity of derivates as a result (English *bluey* ' a kind of shirt, a kind of bag'; Russian *дождевик* ' a raincoat; a kind of mushroom', *змеевик* ' a kind of pipe; a kind of plant; a kind of rock', *зеленушка* ' a kind of bird ; a *kind* of fish; a kind of insect', etc.) .

For predicating derived words things are radically different. Their intension is expressed by the underlying bases which perform the function of predicates in the motivating structures while their idiomatic components have an inferential character and belong to a set of arguments of the predicate or to a range of implications or associations suggested by the bases. As the derivation rules operate semantically on semantic categories which are universal in essence and finite in number (Beard, 1995), idiomatic components of predicating derivates happen most frequently to be regular enough modifications of the major semantic categories involved in the derivation rules (e.g., gradation in derived adjectives, the suffix serving as a marker of the degree of gradation (see for details Kharitonchik, 1986), "professionalism' of derived agentives, etc.). These modifications can be explained in a natural way as soon as the semantic properties of a rule-governed derivation and the redundancy of the semantic information of a derivate are taken into account (as is the case with English *leggy, hairy,* Russian *глазастый* 'big-eyed', *плечистый* 'broad-shouldered' and many others).

It seems to apply even to Similarity derivates built on the underlying bases which are themselves mainly rigid designators or tend to become such and carry about them a host of implications and associations. The idiomatic component which accompanies the grammaticalized derivational meaning of resemblance arises as a result of selecting some feature or property or some culturally determined association out of the set of properties designated by the underlying word (*rocklike, sheeplike, princely* in English; *ледяной* 'icy', *волчий* 'wolfish', *материнский* 'motherly' in Russian). As the set of properties (colour, shape, size, taste, functional use, behaviour, etc.) can be wide enough it leaves room for selecting not one, the most characteristic or typical and therefore the most probable to become the basis for comparison (Motsch, 1977; Plank, 1981) but several properties. The consequences of such selection are the semantic ambiguity of a derivate (cf. *coppery hair, coppery taste, steely-grey eyes, steely wind* in English; *стальные воды залива* ' steely waters of the bay', *стальная воля* ' iron (steel-like) will' in Russian) and the vast semantic potential which can be easily realized in an appropriate context (cf., e.g. *cabbagy taste, cabbagy colour, cabbagy odour*, etc. in English; *медовый вкус* 'the taste of honey', *медовый запах* ' honey odour', *медовый цвет* ' the colour of honey', *медовый компресс* 'a compress made of honey' in Russian). The existence of derivational paradigms of the *manlike - manly - mannish - manful* type in English in which the suffix performs the function of indicating the type of property chosen can be viewed as a way to avoid the ambiguity of derivates. The selectional possibilities in the process of derivation can also bring about the non-equivalence of Similarity derivates built on correlative underlying bases in different languages (cf. English *piggish* 'resembling a pig: Dirty, Greedy, Stubborn' and Russian *свинский* 'resembling a pig: Dirty, Ignoble'; English *bearish* 'resembling a bear in roughness, gruffness, or surliness' and Russian *медвежий* 'resembling a bear : Clumsy').

Regular idiomaticity of Having- and Similarity adjectives places them in contrast to Cause-, Structure-, Location-, etc. adjectives and thus can function as a differentiating factor between two major subclasses within the adjective – descriptive and relative adjectives the specific syntactic behaviour of which (see for details Bolinger, 1967; Marchand, 1966; Kharitonchik, 1986) strengthens their contrast.

The intensional versus implicational types of idiomatic components within the semantics of derived words are specifically related to inference rules making the meaning of a complex expression either transparent enough and predictable or vague and unpredictable.

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