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SEMANTIC STRUCTURE OF IDIOMS OF THE CONCEPTUAL FIELD «FAMILY» IN THE ENGLISH AND CHINESE LINGUOCULTURES

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The paper deals with the semantic analysis of the English and Chinese idioms which constitute the conceptual field “Family”. The definitions of the term ‘idiom’ as well as the classification of idioms by different scientists are given. The correlation between culture and language is scrutinized. With the help of the componential analysis and lemmata analysis the semantic structure of “Family” field and “家jia” field are described. The comparative and contrastive analyses help to distinguish the differences and similarities in the representation of the concept “家jia / family” in English and Chinese linguocultures.

Keywords: idioms, conceptual field, Linguoculture, 家jia / family, English, Chinese.

INTRODUCTION

It is known that language is the main means with the help of which people are able to communicate and exchange ideas. Language is like a bridge between different countries and cultures, and it is the main source of information about the culture. Idioms are the reflections of the environment, life, culture, etc. Idioms can be frequently used in magazines, newspapers, movies or TV shows. They are used in everyday speech. In “A book of English Idioms” V. H. Collins expresses the following opinion: “In standard spoken and written English today idiom is an established, universal and essential element that, used with care, ornaments and enriches the language” [1]. Chinese idioms are called “Chengyu”. It is usually used as a word or a semantic unit in a sentence to force the expression. Cihai defines “chengyu” as “a kind of idiom, set phrases or word groups that are of customary usage” [2].

Carrying out the comparative research of English and Chinese idioms can help us have a better understanding of differences and similarities of these two languages and cultures. The novelty of the research consists in comparing the verbalization peculiarities of the concept “family (家jia)” in English and Chinese idiomatics within the linguistic cultures.

The theoretical value of the research consists in systematization and presentation of the linguistic issues on the Phraseology, cognitive linguistics and linguoculturology. The practical significance of the research consists in application of the results in teaching idioms at English and Chinese classes, in idiomatic, cognitive and cross-cultural researches. The **objective** of the work is to scrutinize the structure of the conceptual field “Family” (家jia) in English and Chinese phraseology within the frames of culture. To gain this objective the following **tasks** have been set: 1) to give the definition of the term “idiom”; 2) to study the classification of idioms in the conceptions of linguists; 3) to scrutinize the correlation of language and culture; 4) to describe the structure of the conceptual field “Family”(家jia) in English and in Chinese. To fulfill the set tasks the following methods were applied: with the

help of sheer sampling method the idioms of conceptual field “Family” (家jia) were selected from the lexicographical sources. Method of componential analysis gives the opportunity to scrutinize the semantics of idioms belonging to the conceptual field “Family” (家jia) in English and Chinese. Method of lemmata analysis contributes to the construction of the conceptual field “Family” (家jia) within idiomatics in English and in Chinese linguocultures. Methods of comparative and contrastive analyses are used to highlight the semantic peculiarities of idioms of the conceptual field under scrutiny.

The material for analyses (85 English idioms and 80 Chinese idioms) has been selected from English and Chinese idiomatic dictionaries: Webster’s New World College Dictionary (3rd Edition), Cambridge Dictionaries Online, Oxford Dictionaries Online, Free Dictionaries online, and Idioms Online.

RELATED WORK

1. The definitions of idioms.

The word “idiom” is from the ancient Greek word “idioma”, meaning “peculiarity” or “specialty”. In Oxford Advanced Learner’s English-Chinese Dictionary “idiom” is defined as “a phrase or a sentence whose meaning is not clear from the meaning of its individual words and which must be learnt as a whole unit” [3]. Cambridge International Dictionary of English with Chinese Translations defines “idiom” as “a group of words in a fixed order having a particular meaning, different from the meaning of each word understood on its own” [4].

A Chinese linguist Wen claims that “a Chinese idiom, constituted by words, relatively fixed in structure, is a narrative language unit which can perform a multiple of functions” [5]. Cihai defines “chengyu” as “a kind of idiom, set phrases or word groups that are of customary usage” [2]. To sum up, idioms are fixed phrases. They go through the test of history and cannot be separated. They are an important part of the general vocabulary of every language as “language is the carrier container of culture, and is strongly influenced and shaped by culture” [5, p.13]:

EN: “a match made in heaven”— a perfect marriage;

CN: “望子成龙 (wang zi cheng long)” — (lit.) hope one’s child to become a dragon; (fig.) hold high hopes for one’s child. So in order to master idioms, we cannot ignore the importance of the cultural connotation they contain.

2. Structural classification of idioms

It is acknowledged that the structure of idioms is related to the structure of their non-idiomatic counterparts. Phrasal idioms have the structure of a phrase of different types and are further subdivided into verbal (semi-clause idioms) and non-verbal (nominal) idioms. The most frequent patterns of analyzed verbal idioms are as follows:

1) V + (Art) + (Adj) + N + (Prep +N) (e.g. have a soft spot for father – to feel a lot of affection for father)

2) V + Art + N (e.g., tie the knot – get married; take the plunge – to marry someone)

3) V + Prep + N (e.g., live in sin – live together as though married unmarried)

4) V + Adj (e.g., get serious – have a relationship with someone)

5) V + Adv (+Pron) (e.g., get back together – to return to a relationship or marriage after separating)

6) N+ V + Conj + (Art) + N (e.g., Marriage is like a lottery – Husband and wife should get energy from each other and encourage each other)

7) V + Conj+ Pron + Prep + (Art) +N (e.g., be like one of the family – used as a way to say that someone or something is a part of the family, or a member of the family.)

8) Pron+ V + Neg. part. + subordinate clause (e.g., He knows not what love is that has no children – one never understand the love between children and parents if he has no child)

Non-verbal (nominal) idioms have different syntagmatic structure and function as word classes representing nominal, adjectival or adverbial idioms. As far as nominal idioms are concerned, these can take the following forms:

1) Art+ Adj/-ed/-ing + N (e.g., a confirmed bachelor – a man who has decided on principle never to marry)

2) N + N (e.g., marriage market – taking care of one's marriage should like running a good market)

3) N's + N (e.g., mother's boy – a boy excessively attached to his mother; lacking normal masculine interests)

4) (Adj+) N + Prep + N (e.g., tug of love – dispute over the custody).

Since the Chinese language has a more complex system of word-constitute, we here just divide these idioms into 2 groups, verbal idioms and non-verbal idioms. The most usual patterns of verbal idioms are as follows:

1) N (subordinate clause) + V + N (subordinate clause) + V

e.g., 父债子还 (fù zhài zǐ hái) – a dutiful son is obliged to pay his father's debts; 爷饭娘羹 (yé fàn niáng gēng) – (fig.) living under parents' shade; (lit.) parents can always cook for their children

2) V + N (subordinate clause) + V + N (subordinate clause)

e.g., 打断骨头连着筋 (dǎ duàn gǔ tóu lián zhe jīn) – We are brothers who are still connected by our flesh even if our bones are broken; 安居乐业 (ān jū lè yè) – live and work in peace and contentment

3) V + N (subordinate clause)

e.g., 知子莫若父 (zhī zǐ mò ruò fù) – Father is always the one who knows his son better; 老牛舐犊 (lǎo niú shì dú) – dote on one's children

4) N (subordinate clause) + V

e.g., 和气生财 (hé qì shēng cái) – harmony in family brings wealth; 骨肉离散 (gǔ ròu lí sǎn) – get separated from the family

5) N + N + V

e.g., 埙篪相和 (xūn chí xiāng hè) – good relation between two brothers

Non-verbal (nominal) idioms have different syntagmatic structure and function as word classes representing nominal or adjectival. As far as nominal idioms are concerned, they can take the following forms:

1) only nouns appeared in the idioms

e.g., 儿女夫妻 (ér nǚ fū qī) – (fig.) A couple grew up together since childhood, (lit.) Young “baby” couples; 三亲六眷 (sān qīn liù juàn) – all the kinsmen

2) Adj + N + Adj + N

e.g. 佳儿佳妇 (jiā ér jiā fù) – only after having a good son can get a good daughter-in-law;

干柴烈火 (gàn chái liè huǒ) – caught in a passion

Through these structural classifications of idioms, we can observe that no matter English or Chinese idioms, their system of structure reflects their language system.

3. Semantic Classification of Idioms

S. Gluckberg [6] distinguishes the following semantic types of idioms:

1. Transparent idioms, where there are one-to-one semantic relations between the idiom's constituents and components of the idiom's meaning:

e.g., to get back together = to return to a relationship or marriage

2. Semi-transparent idioms which usually carry a metaphorical sense that could not be known only through common use:

e.g., on the rocks = difficult situation in relationship

3. Semi-opaque idioms. This type refers to those idioms in which the figurative meaning is not joined to that of the constituent words of the idiom:

e.g., have a soft spot = to have a feeling of affection for being a father; born with a silver spoon in one's mouth = to be born to a wealthy family with many advantages

4. Opaque idioms are the idioms in which the relations between idiom's constituents and its meaning may be opaque, but the meanings of individual words can nevertheless contain both interpretation and use:

e.g., take the plunge = to marry someone; lead someone up the side = get married to someone.

C. Cacciari, following the same criteria of compositionality, distinguishes among idioms [7, p.43]:

1. Normally decomposable idioms, which are analyzable and imply conventions whereby each of the idiom's constituents can be used to refer to the idiomatic referent:

e.g., break the ice = to attempt to become friends with someone; pop the question = to ask a woman to marry him.

2. Abnormally decomposable idioms, where we are able to identify this relation only by virtue of conventional metaphors that govern the mapping from constituents to idiomatic meanings:

e.g., carry a torch for = feel love for; eternal triangle = a relationship between three people.

3. Non-decomposable idioms represent the group of opaque idioms:

e.g., calf love = the love to children.

Meaning is the most important factor when we talk about semantic classification of idioms. The most dominant feature of semantic classifications of idioms is whether they composite semantically empty words. When such idioms occur, they should be taken symbolically or metaphorically. Such idioms should show a different degree of semantic opacity or, in other words, non-literality.

Fernando C. indicates that a semantic classification depends on the degree of semantic isolation and the degree of opacity. She distinguishes three different groups of idioms, which are as follows [8, p.43]:

1) pure idioms. They are opaque to users of language with respect to all or some of the words that make them up. Formally such idioms are multiword expressions functioning as a single semantic unit whose meaning of individual words cannot be summed together to produce the meaning of the whole:

e.g., empty nest syndrome = the sad feelings which parents have when their children grow up and leave home;

2) semi-idioms. The typical results of such idioms are partial non-literality because one component generally preserves its direct meaning:

e.g., ugly duckling = an ugly awkward child who grows up to be beautiful; live in sin = live together as though married but being unmarried;

3) literal idioms. They can be interpreted on the basis of their parts; they are transparent. Components of such idioms are usually used in their direct meaning; although, such combination sometimes requires figurative sense:

e. g., like one of the family = like someone was a member of one's family.

4. Correlation between language and culture

Language is the main functional tool of communication, it allows people to express themselves, it is also the most direct way of self-expression, helping to make integration and social adaptation, as well as to hold social control [9]. Culture is a "system of rules of communication and interaction that allows a society occurs, preserved, and preserved" [10].

G. Lakoff is one of Whorfian hypothesis approach supporter. He argues that "language is often used metaphorically and that languages use different cultural metaphors that reveal something about how speakers of that language think" [cit. by 11]. For example, English employs conceptual metaphors comparing time with money, so that time can be saved and spent and invested, whereas other languages do not talk about time in that way.

5. Conceptual field

The conceptual field is at the same time a set of situations and a set of concepts tied together. By this it is meant that a concept's meaning does not come from one situation only but from a variety of situations and that, reciprocally, a situation cannot be analyzed with one concept alone, but rather with several concepts, forming systems. We also found a very interesting explanation of "family" in a magazine: family-based on this perspective, is each individual's interpretation of who their kin are. The basic argument is that meanings and interpretations have no connection to rules, norms, or culture. Thus, the definition of family is based on the individual's local subculture and is his or her own reality. For example, Barbara Rothberg and Dan Weinstein illustrate an inclusive definition that can encompass all local subcultures by stating that "the constellation of family is limited only by the limits of participants' creativity" [cit. by 12].

6. Comparative analysis of English and Chinese idioms of the conceptual field of "Family" (家jia)

Oxford dictionary online defines 'family' as "a group consisting of two parents and their children living together as a unit". Another definition in online dictionary is "two or more people who share goals and values, have long-term commitments to one another and reside usually in the same dwelling"[13]. In Chinese semantic field "Family" (家jia) has different meanings. The Chinese online dictionary "Chinesehelper" defines it as "the certain place where the family members (relatives) live" [14]. Also another online dictionary "汉典 (han dian)" defines "family" as "where home is located" [15].

The analysis of English and Chinese idioms of the conceptual field “Family” (家jia) was carried out in such aspects:

1. Relationship between parents and children.
2. Marriage.
3. Relationships in the family.

1. Relationship between parents and children.
In Chinese families, physical punishment of children even is a kind of way to show their love to their children “不教，父之过 (zì bu jiào, fù zhī guo)” it means “the son’s fault is the affect of his father’s bad teaching”.

In English idioms, they emphasize more the influence of parents on children. E.g., “Tied to someone’s apron strings” means that the child is too much under the influence and control of someone (especially used to suggest that a man is too much influenced by his mother); “chip off the old block” is a person (usually a male) who behaves in the same way as his father or resembles his father.

2. Marriage.

In the ancient Chinese society females had lower social status than males, so lot of Chinese idioms express this phenomenon. Usually the wife is proud of her husband’s glory. One can find the following idiom: “夫唱妇随 (fū chàng fù suí)” which literally means that ‘a wife echos for her husband’s singing’, but deeply it describes a harmonic family atmosphere; “举案齐眉 (jǔ àn qí méi)” – ‘the wife should show high respect to her husband’.

In Western countries a wife and a husband have more equal social status than the Chinese do. The English idioms about a wife and a husband are focused on “Love” and “Complementary”. For example, “Marriage is like a lottery” which means that a husband and a wife should get energy from each other and encourage each other.

3. Relationships in the family.

In China talking about children and an older generation, besides close relationships, we emphasize “respect” more. E.g., “先意承旨 (xiān yì chéng zhǐ)” – Children should do everything with parents’ permission to show respect to parents; “孝思不匮 (xiào sī bù kuì)” – Never forget to show respect to parents.

But in English idioms people seem to emphasize close relationship and never to reveal family’s secret, e.g., “in the family – restricted to one’s own family, as with private or embarrassing information”; “foul one’s own nest – to harm one’s own interests, to bring discredit to one’s family”.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Besides the mentioned above differences, there are also a lot of similarities in Chinese and English idioms concerning the expression of “family affection”. Both English and Chinese idioms use metaphor “blood and bones” to describe their family and relatives:

EN: “Blood will tell” – Family characteristics cannot be concealed.

CH: “打断骨头连着筋” – it means we are brothers who are still connected by our flesh even if our bones are broken.

Having been analyzed from the three above mentioned viewpoints, the idioms were classified into a clear way. This leads to the conclusion that the family idioms represent an essential part of the core vocabulary both in English and Chinese, however, the high numbers of the idioms show that vast majority of idioms are not similar in the meaning, structure

and usage. The further study of the idioms of non-related languages in the comparative and contrastive aspects will contribute greatly to defining the universal and cultural peculiarities of every national culture.

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**СЕМАНТИЧЕСКАЯ СТРУКТУРА ИДИОМ КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНОГО ПОЛЯ
«СЕМЬЯ» В АНГЛИЙСКОЙ И КИТАЙСКОЙ ЛИНГВОКУЛЬТУРАХ**

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В статье представлен семантический анализ английских и китайских идиом, которые образуют концептуальное поле «семья». Представлены определения термина идиома, рассмотрены классификации идиом в концепциях разных ученых. Исследуется соотношение культуры и языка. С помощью компонентного анализа и анализа словарных дефиниций описана семантическая структура полей «Family» и «家jia». Сравнительно-сопоставительный анализ помогает выявить отличия и сходства в репрезентации концепта «家jia /family» в английской и китайской лингвокультурах.

Ключевые слова: идиомы, концептуальное поле, лингвокультура, 家jia /family, английский язык, китайский язык.