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COMPARATIVE IDIOMS WITH AN ORNITHONYM COMPONENT DESCRIBING HUMAN APPEARANCE IN ENGLISH AND UKRAINIAN

Summary. Phraseological units, as a significant component of the word stock of any language and a linguistic universal, continue to attract sustained scholarly interest within linguistic studies. The article highlights comparative bird idioms denoting human appearance in genetically and structurally different languages – English and Ukrainian. The research aims to analyse the semantic features and cultural connotations of the comparative idioms with an ornithonym component in the contrasted languages. The material for the analysis was fifty-three comparative bird idioms describing human appearance which were obtained through the sampling method from English and Ukrainian dictionaries. The following methods were used for the research: the descriptive method, the linguocultural method and the contrastive method. The analysis made it possible to classify the studied phraseological units into six semantic groups: (1) overall appearance and clothing; (2) color characteristics; (3) physical constitution and individual physical features (parts of the body); (4) posture and manner of movement; (5) physical condition and overall look (visually perceived characteristics as markers of health, fatigue or weakness); (6) voice features as a physical characteristic. Our findings showed the first and third groups as the most productive among them. Both common and divergent features of the bird idioms denoting human appearance were identified. Common is the use of such standard images as a crow, raven, swan which argues the universal nature of certain symbols. At the same time, each language demonstrates a unique system of images: in Ukrainian, these are the images of a heron, crane, nightingale, while in English, the images of a robin, coot and peacock are used. We found out that birds as image-bearers represent both positive and negative connotations but in both languages negative connotations prevail in describing appearance. Thus, comparative bird idioms function in both languages not only as descriptive means but also as samples of cultural stereotypes and evaluative patterns towards human appearance. Our findings may be helpful for teaching contrastive typology of the English and Ukrainian languages, as well as in teaching English as a foreign language.

Key words: comparative idioms, ornithonym, human appearance, comparing (contrasting), positive connotation, negative connotation, English and Ukrainian languages.

Introduction. Phraseologisms are considered to be one of the most representative language units reflecting the linguistic worldview of every nation, its specific mentality, historical, cultural and linguistic development. Comparative idioms are of particular interest for analysis. K. Mizin states that "... comparative

phraseology as a universal semiotic and semantic phenomenon is a separate phraseological system of any language" [1, p. 62].

Comparative idioms can be defined as a special type of phraseological units, which are "stable, reproducible, partially or fully reinterpreted expressive language units which having formal features of comparativity are represented by comparative conjunctions or other comparative constructions" [2, p. 8]. Thus, the cognitive mechanism of comparison through which "man has long been comprehending the surrounding world and himself" [3, p. 228] forms the basis of these phraseological units. Comparative idioms are reproduced in the language according to a certain syntactic model and perform reinforcing and emotional-evaluative functions. Within them "lingual and extralingual universal factors which are accumulated mainly by standard images" [1, p. 62] are united. Among these standard images ornithonyms are widely used.

Review of recent research and publications. Research studies by M. Kyrylyuk & N. Stavchuk (2018), I. Kuznietsova & O. Artemenkova (2019), N. Tymoshchuk (2019, 2022), T. Ivasyshyna & O. Demianenko (2023), O. Shulenok (2023) revealed scientists' interest in the phraseological units with an ornithonym component or so-called "bird idioms" including contrastive analysis of their linguistic and cultural peculiarities in English and Ukrainian, as well as scholars' special attention to comparative phraseology (K. Mizin (2007, 2009), N. Barannik (2014), K. Rodionova (2017), etc.). However, despite the considerable number of works devoted to the study of such phraseological units, a number of questions still require further analysis. The current study focuses on the comparative idioms with a bird component that describe human appearance in English and Ukrainian. The study aims to reveal the semantic features of such idioms in two languages, to identify the underlying images and their cultural connotations, to study common and divergent characteristics of these phraseological units in English and Ukrainian. Thus, on the one hand, this research provides deeper insight into understanding of cross-cultural differences and similarities. On the other hand, grasping the image underlying a phraseological unit contributes to a higher level of language proficiency for the Ukrainian learners of English and fosters greater interest in the language study.

This purpose of the article is to analyse comparative bird idioms denoting human appearance in English and Ukrainian in order to identify their semantic peculiarities, cultural connotations. The following objectives were set to achieve this aim: to collect and classify the ornithonym-based comparative idioms describing

human appearance; to examine their semantic content and underlying imagery; to compare the English and Ukrainian units and determine their cross-cultural differences and similarities.

The material for the analysis was fifty-three comparative bird idioms describing human appearance which were obtained through the sampling method from Dictionaries of English Idioms [4; 5; 6] and Ukrainian Phraseological Dictionaries [7; 8]. The data were collected with the help of the following methods: the sampling method was employed to select empirical material, the descriptive method helped to determine the features of the selected idioms, the linguocultural method was used to identify national and cultural connotations, the contrastive method was aimed at identifying common and divergent features of English and Ukrainian comparative idioms.

Presentation of the main material. The analysis of comparative idioms with an ornithonym component in English and Ukrainian has revealed the names of birds as culturally rich image-bearers for describing human appearance. This agrees with T. Ivasyshyna & O. Demianenko's standpoint that phraseological units with a bird-name component add expressive emotionality to the language creating a vivid range of associations [9, p. 106].

The semantic field of appearance includes comparative bird idioms that describe a person's physical features, outward look and visually perceived characteristics. Thus, among the analysed comparative idioms with an ornithonym component we can single out the following semantic groups: (1) overall appearance and clothing; (2) color characteristics; (3) physical constitution and individual physical features (parts of the body); (4) posture and manner of movement; (5) physical condition and overall look (visually perceived characteristics as markers of health, fatigue or weakness); (6) voice features as a physical characteristic.

(1) Overall impression of appearance is related to the perception of such concepts as attractiveness (beauty) and unattractiveness, as well as neatness and untidiness.

In the English language, the peacock, a bird known for its bright, multicoloured plumage, is used as an image-bearer in the idiom "*as gaudy as a peacock*", describing a person dressed in a flashy, tasteless manner. As we can see, the bird's bright colouring, paradoxically, becomes a marker of poor aesthetic judgment rather than natural beauty. A semantically similar idiom is the expression "*to be/look like a jackdaw in peacock's feathers*" but an image-bearer in this idiom is the jackdaw. It is a plain, ordinary bird but decorated with the plumage of a peacock, it becomes a symbol of someone whose appearance is pretentious and inappropriate. Both idioms share an ironic evaluative connotation suggesting that excessive decoration makes an unpleasant rather than attractive impression.

In Ukrainian, a semantically equivalent image is found in the expression "*як півень розмальований*" which, like its English counterpart "*as gaudy as a peacock*", conveys the idea of a person dressed in an excessively bright, tasteless manner. There is one more Ukrainian synonymic bird idiom with the same image-bearer: "*вирядитися як півень на ярмарок*". The rooster, with its vivid plumage, functions as a culturally recognisable symbol of pretentious appearance in the Ukrainian linguistic tradition.

To depict an individual as physically unattractive, the negatively connotated semantics of a duck's appearance is conveyed in the Ukrainian comparative bird idiom "*виглядати як качка*". The idiom "*вродлива як сова*" is also used to describe an unattractive

person. The owl is known not only as a symbol of wisdom (as in English "*as wise as an owl*" and Ukrainian "*головатий як сова*"), gloominess (as in English "*as grave as an owl*" and Ukrainian "*надіється як сич*"), nocturnal life (as in English "*as sleepy as an owl*") but also of a certain awkwardness and unattractiveness as in the mentioned Ukrainian idiom. Thus, in this case we deal with the opposition of explicit and implicit meaning. The antiphrastic character of the phraseological unit "*вродлива як сова*" is clear and produces a humorous, belittling effect. A similar ironic structure to describe an unattractive person, namely to ridicule a person's dishevelled or pitiable appearance, we also observe in other bird idioms but with another image-bearer: "*красива як мокра курка*" and "*гарний як обципана ворона*". According to M. Holtsova, such antiphrasis-based idioms "do not give information on the comparison between objects, but instead serve basically as a means of intensifying the denotative meaning of words and not establishing a real comparison" [10, p. 50]. It is noteworthy that Ukrainian idioms are characterised by a wide use of irony. This also applies to comparative idioms with an ornithonym component.

In English, untidiness is represented through the idiom "*as shabby as a tailless sparrow*". The image-bearer is a sparrow deprived of its most noticeable feature, thus, looking untidy and pitiful. In Ukrainian, the expression of similar semantics is based on another image-bearer "hen" which also conveys an unkempt, shabby look: "*облізла як курка*". Of interest is the expression "*наче гуси ночували*" which is used in the Ukrainian language to describe a state of general disorder and untidiness in appearance (or surroundings). It is based on the similar image-bearer "geese".

At the same time, in the English language, the image-bearer "hen" is also observed in the expression "*to look like a plucked hen*". However, its semantics is narrower as this idiom is used to denote a person who has had too much hair cut away or tweaked out [5]. There is one more variant of this expression but with the image-bearer "chicken": "*to look like a plucked chicken*".

The same image-bearer "hen", namely the wet hen, represents a generally pitiful, wretched appearance in the Ukrainian idiom "*(зачмоканий) як змокла курка*". This comparative bird idiom has a partial equivalent in the English language "*like a (dying) duck in a thunderstorm*". It conveys a similarly negative visual impression of a person who looks helpless, miserable or disoriented but it is based on the image-bearer "duck".

Among the analysed comparative idioms with an ornithonym component, we observe the English idiom "*as naked as a jaybird/robin*" which describes a person who is completely bare or stripped of any clothing. The small, unprotected bird is used as a natural symbol of vulnerability. In Ukrainian, a similar image is found in the expression "*голий як пташеня*". It similarly uses the image of a baby-bird to convey the idea of complete nakedness. However, this idiom is rarely used to describe a person's appearance, more often its meaning is "a very poor person". One more nationally marked bird idiom that describes a person's appearance in the aspect of clothes we found in the English language: "*to look like a trussed chicken*". This expression is also of negative connotation and it is used to depict a person whose clothes are far too tight, the image referring to a chicken prepared for frying.

(2) The colour characteristics of appearance represent a further semantic subgroup.

In English, "*as black as a crow/raven*" describes an extremely dark complexion or colour of human's hair on

the basis of the universally recognised blackness of these birds. The Ukrainian language offers the structurally and semantically equivalent expressions “чорний як галка/крук” and further intensifies the comparison through the numeral hyperbole “чорний як сім галок”. Thus, these bird-names function as cultural symbols of darkness across both English and Ukrainian linguistic traditions.

Within this semantic group we observe phraseological units revealing a distinctly national character. For example, a white-grey colouring of somebody’s hair or paleness in the Ukrainian language is expressed with the help of the bird idiom “як голуб сивий/білий”. In English, the comparative idiom with an ornithonym component “as red as a turkey-cock” is used to describe a flushed, deeply reddened face, usually associated with anger, embarrassment or physical efforts. The pigeon and the turkey-cock with their colour characteristics serve as vivid and culturally recognisable image-bearers for these comparisons.

To this semantic group, we have also included two comparative idioms with components that are not ornithonyms proper but are associated with birds, namely with their anatomical features. In the English language, yellowish or sallow complexion is described with the help of the expression “as yellow as a crow’s foot”, an image referring to the colour of the bird’s scaly foot. In Ukrainian, the idiom “синій як той курячий пуп” is used to describe an unnatural, sickly colour of skin. This image draws on the characteristically bluish-tinged colour of this part of the chicken’s body. These two phraseological units are also nationally marked.

(3) Physical constitution and individual body features constitute another productive semantic group within comparative bird idioms in two languages.

In English, the idiom “as bald as a coot” denotes a person who is completely bald. It is based on the image of a coot with its distinctive white frontal shield which resembles a bald patch [5]. The ironic expression “as fat as a hen in the forehead” is used to describe a very thin person (since in reality a hen’s forehead is very narrow). It deserves special attention as antiphrasis-based idiom within the group of comparative bird idioms denoting human appearance in the English language. These expressions are also nationally marked.

In the Ukrainian language, we observe two synonymic bird idioms that use the bird’s small size to characterise a person of short or slight constitution but on the basis of different image-bearers: “маленький як голуб” and “маленький як горобець”. At the same time, the size and light body of a sparrow are also metaphorically linked to human slenderness: “худий як горобчик”. The idiom “(сили) як у горобця” further extends this associative chain, using the suggested physical weakness of this bird to describe a person with very little physical strength. One more physical characteristic – exceptional height – is represented with the help of the image of the crane: “високий як журавель”. A tall, slender figure of this bird serves as a natural image-bearer for a very tall person

Another Ukrainian comparative idiom “очі як у сови” focuses on the owl’s large eyes as its distinctive feature to denote corresponding physical features in a person. Similarly, the heron, a tall wading bird with exceptionally long, slender legs, is used as an image-bearer to describe a person’s legs in bird idioms “ноги як у чаплі” and “довгонога як та чапля”. Both phraseological units have a mildly ironic, humorous connotation, as the heron’s

legs, while functional and even elegant for the bird itself, appear disproportional and somewhat funny when associated with a human being. It is noteworthy that all three Ukrainian idioms in this subgroup are built on the same principle: the use of a bird’s most visually distinctive anatomical feature as an etalon of comparison with a corresponding human physical characteristic.

It should be noted that though the word “feather” is not an ornithonym proper, it belongs to the same associative field and functions within the same image-bearing system. The expressions “as light as a feather” in English and “легкий як пір’їнка” in Ukrainian are complete equivalents in the contrasted languages. They draw on the near-weightlessness of a bird’s feather and may be used to characterise a thin, lightweight person.

(4) Posture and manner of movement perceived as elements of overall physical impression are also represented through ornithonyms as image-bearers in the contrasted languages.

In English, the expression “as graceful as a swan” attributes physical elegance and beauty of a movement to a person considering the swan’s idealised image in the European cultural tradition.

In Ukrainian, we observe a semantically similar but structurally different bird idiom with the swan as image-bearer: “іти (пливти) мов лебідь”. At the same time, the semantic space of the Ukrainian language is characterised by two images with negative connotation. To depict a person who moves clumsily and without grace, the negatively colored semantics of a hen’s manner of movement is conveyed in the idiom “незграбний як курка”. Another expression “ходить як деркач” conveys an awkward gait through the image of the cornrake, a bird which is also known for its clumsy terrestrial movement.

(5) Physical condition and overall look, namely visually perceived characteristics as markers of health, fatigue or weakness, constitute another semantic subgroup.

In English, the idiom “like a chicken with the pip” describes a person who looks unwell, the image referring to a sick chicken, listless, ruffled and weary. The owl we fix as another image-bearer in this subgroup: “as grave as an owl” and “as sleepy as an owl”. Both images draw on the bird’s nocturnal nature and characteristic stillness to describe a gloomy-looking person or a tired, drowsy individual.

To this semantic group, we also include the Ukrainian expression “як змолка курка” and its partial English equivalent “like a (dying) duck in a thunderstorm” as due to their polysemy, these comparative idioms can objectify various human traits and characteristics. These two idioms we described above.

(6) Voice features as a physical characteristic is also represented through ornithonym imagery in both languages.

The idioms “as hoarse as a crow/raven” in English and “каркати як ворона” та “крякає як качка” in Ukrainian are based on the association with the harsh, rasping sounds produced by these birds. They are used to describe an unpleasant, rough voice. These idioms are of similar semantics but have different structures in the contrasted languages. In Ukrainian, not only a crow is used as an image bearer but also a duck.

A contrasting positive image is also observed in both languages. It attributes a melodic, pleasant voice to a person: “to sing like a bird” and “говорить, наче пташка щебечить”. In the Ukrainian language, we also observe the nightingale as an image-bearer: “говорить, наче соловей співає” and “зали-

вається, мов соловейко на калині”. Both comparative idioms attribute a special melodic sounding to a person’s voice or speech. The use of the crow and raven as symbols of the unpleasant quality of human’s voice in both languages confirms the cross-cultural nature of this ornithonym image, while the nightingale as a symbol of voice beauty is a culturally marked image-bearer.

Our observations based on the analysed material allow us to conclude that ornithonym-based comparative idioms are quite productive in describing various features of human appearance. Birds as image-bearers represent both positive and negative connotations. However, in both languages negative connotations prevail in describing appearance. It may be explained by the expressive nature of the phraseological units which, as a rule, focus on emphasising deviations from the norm. As a result, comparative bird idioms function in both languages not only as descriptive means but also as samples of cultural stereotypes and evaluative patterns towards human appearance.

It should be mentioned that studying the common and divergent features of phraseological units of two languages deepens the understanding of language as the cultural code of a nation. Since comparison is one of the significant conceptual categories that reflect the subtle intertwining of thinking and language, the study of comparative idioms makes it possible to study the stereotypes of thinking and worldview of a certain linguistic group. Consequently, we consider these idioms to be an effective illustrative material that can be used in the lectures in “Contrastive typology of the English and Ukrainian languages”, as well as the content of practical tasks within this theoretical discipline. These materials can also be useful for expanding students’ vocabulary and language awareness in the practical course “Oral and written speech practice (the English language)”, particularly while working on the module “Appearance and character”.

Conclusion and perspectives of further research. To summarise, comparative bird idioms can be regarded as specific linguistic formulae and fragments of the worldview in which the perception of reality by previous generations is encoded, reflecting the cultural potential and mentality of a given nation. The way of life of birds, their behaviour, characteristic features – all this was conceived by human beings and often combined with human imagination. In fact, although the image-bearers – the names of birds often coincide in English and Ukrainian, at the same time each nation has its own system of symbols and a peculiar vision of the surrounding world. Thus, the analysis of the corpus of English and Ukrainian comparative idioms with an ornithonym component has revealed both common and divergent features within this group and demonstrated similar evaluative patterns which suggests a shared tendency to associate birds with expressive characterisation.

The forthcoming point of the research is the one that aims at further comparing and contrasting phraseological systems of English and Ukrainian, namely the comparative bird idioms denoting human character.

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Лук’яненко І. Порівняльні фразеологізми з компонентом орнітонімом, що репрезентують зовнішність людини (на матеріалі англійської та української мов)

Анотація. Фразеологічні одиниці, як вагома складова словникового складу будь-якої мови та мовна універсалія, постійно перебувають у колі уваги лінгвістів. У статті висвітлюються порівняльні фразеологізми з компонентом орнітонімом, що репрезентують зовнішність людини, у різномовних мовах – англійській та українській. Метою дослідження було проаналізувати семантичні особливості та культурні конотації зазначених фразеологізмів у зіставлених мовах. Дослідження виконано на матеріалі англійських та українських словників, з яких методом суцільної вибірки було обрано корпус із п’ятдесяти трьох порівняльних зворотів з компонентом орнітонімом, що репрезентують зовнішність людини. У процесі дослідження було застосовано описовий, лінгвокультурологічний та контрастивний методи аналізу. Проведений аналіз дозволив класифікувати досліджувані одиниці за шістьма семантичними групами: (1) загальне враження від зовнішності та одягу, (2) колористичні характеристики, (3) будова тіла та окремі фізичні риси, (4) постава і манера пересування, (5) фізичний стан і загальний вигляд, (6) характеристики голосу як фізичної ознаки людини. З’ясовано, що найбільш продуктивними серед них є перша та третя групи. Виявлено як спільні, так і відмінні риси досліджуваних одиниць. Спільним є використання таких образів-еталонів, як ворона,

крук, лебідь, що свідчить про універсальний характер певних символів. Водночас кожна мова демонструє самобутню систему образів: в українській активно використовуються образи чаплі, журавля, соловейка, тоді як в англійській – вільшанки, лиски, павича. Встановлено, що птахи як образи-еталони репрезентують як позитивні, так і негативні конотації, проте в обох мовах у змалюванні зовнішності переважають саме негативні. Отримані результати підтверджують, що порівняльні фразеологізми з компонентом орнітонімом є не лише описовими засобами, а й зразками культурних стереотипів і оцінних моделей щодо зовнішності людини, притаманних кожній із досліджуваних лінгвокультур. Отримані результати можуть стати у пригоді для викладання порівняльної

типології англійської та української мов, а також у практиці навчання англійської мови як іноземної.

Ключові слова: порівняльні фразеологізми, орнітонім, зовнішність людини, порівняння (зіставлення), позитивна конотація, негативна конотація, англійська та українська мови.

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