

Veronika N.Telija,  
Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences  
Anna V. Doroshenko, Moscow Institute of Business

# The motivational basis in the semantics of idioms and ways of its presentation in the computer data base

*ABSTRACT: The meaning of most Idioms is associated with the underlying empirical image, which together with the syntactic structure of the Idiomatic word-combination motivates this meaning. The motivation affects the denotation of meaning, its evaluative and expressive nature, and bears on its collocational and pragmatic potentialities. The paper discusses the principles of investigation and description of the mechanisms of Idiom motivation and suggests ways of using the motivational features in computer technology for compiling dictionaries.*

The aim of the publication is twofold: 1. To establish the scope of features, motivating the meaning of idioms (defined as reinterpreted word-combinations the meaning of which can not be reduced to the combination of lexical and grammatical meanings of the constituent words). 2. To introduce the principles of singling out and format processing of motivational features in the data base of the Computerized Ideographic Dictionary of Idioms (CIDI) (*Maket slovornoj stat'i...*, 1991). The meaning of idioms predominantly results from reinterpreting the meaning of the original word-combinations. The notion of idiom motivation still remains obscure, whereas the empirical associations of the image at the basis of the idiomatic meaning motivate all the idiom components. In order to demonstrate how motivational mechanisms operate, let us consider examples with identical expression planes but different associative-figurative bases – figurative Gestalt structures in the sense of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and hence with different meanings. The idioms to be compared are *BOK O BOK* 'side by side' and *POD RUKOJ* 'at hand' in their two meanings – spatial (I) and interpersonal (II). The idiom *BOK O BOK* (I) colligates with verbs of location (*stojat'*, *raspologat'sja*, etc.) and verbs of direction of motion (*idti*, *ehat'*, etc.), and has the meaning "persons or things X and Y are close together in space and side with each other (as if touching each other's sides)": *Lošadi stojali bok o bok* 'The horses were standing side by side'; *Budem deržat'sja bok o bok, ne othodja drug ot druga* 'Let's keep side by side, not leaving one another'. The idiom *BOK O BOK* (II) colligates with verbs of action (*rabotat'*, *sražat'sja*, etc.) and has the meaning "persons or groups of people X and Y interact as one functional whole, using concerted efforts to achieve a common goal (as if touching each other's sides and thus combining efforts)": *Naši batal'ony sražalis' bok o bok, podderživaja dru druga ogněm* 'Our batallions were fighting side

by side providing fire support'. Compare also: *POD RUKOJ čto u kogo* (I) 'at hand' – about a thing, colligates with verbs of location and has the meaning "a thing X is within close reach of a person Y (as if under his/her hand – in a place convenient for use)": *Nužnye knigi u menja vsegda pod rukoj* 'I always keep the necessary books at hand'; and *POD RUKOJ kto u kogo* (II) 'at hand' – about a person, colligates with verbs of possession and has the meaning "a person or group of persons X are at the disposal of a person or group of persons Y (as if under one's hand – within the sphere of influence)": *On vsegda imel pod rukoj neskol'ko čelovek, gotovyh vypolnit' ego poručenie* 'He used to have a few people at hand ready to run his errands'.

It is evident that in (I) the indication of close spatial proximity of things and/or persons constitutes the basis of the denotational aspect of meaning, i.e. the ability of meaning to point to the class of denoted fragments of the world. The empirical image which is physically perceived is chosen here as an analogy allowing the meaning transfer of the word-combination. Thus, in *BOK O BOK* (I) the senses 'close to' and 'beside one another' and the figurative basis 'touching one another's sides' interact and merge into one categorizing denominative basis. The categorial similarity of the denominative plan and the empirical image - their spatial reference – does not stimulate the conditions for a considerable sense augment to the meaning *BOK O BOK* (I). Nevertheless, even this idiom reveals its reference to the empirical image, and within the framework of this reference a figurative Gestalt is formed as a reduced image, associated with the given meaning.

The analysis of *BOK O BOK* (II) shows that, apart from forming the denotation of the idiom, the figurative Gestalt structure affects the evaluative and stylistic aspects of the meaning. The denotation of meaning in *BOK O BOK* (II) is formed by the interaction of two frames, involved in the categorization of "the thing meant": the denominative basis is represented by the category "interpersonal relations", and the figurative basis – "spatial reference – close to, nearby". The influence of the empirical image on the denotation is revealed in the change of variables: here X and Y can only be human beings, acting as one functional whole to achieve a common goal. The figurative Gestalt is associated with the idea given in brackets: (as if touching each other's sides and thus supporting each other). If (I) is indifferent to evaluation, (II) implies the modality of positive rational evaluation of the denotation of meaning, after Wierzbicka and Wolf (Wierzbicka 1980, Vol'f 1985): "X and Y interact in a common state of affairs, combining efforts to achieve a common aim, and the speaker considers it 'good'".

The meaning of *BOK O BOK* (II) is clearly distinct from (I) in its expressiveness, because apart from the rational evaluation, (II) is loaded with emotional evaluation – a positive feeling-attitude experienced by the speaker. Thus, the utterance *My trudilis' bok o bok* 'We worked side by side' can be continued: ... *i èto sblizilo nas, prineslo svoi plody i t.p.* '...and it brought us close together / yielded fruitful results, etc.'. The positive emotional evaluation is associated with the figurative Gestalt, rather than with the denotation. The figurative Gestalt "flashes" in consciousness and "triggers" emotional sentiments. Its role consists exclusively in setting the affective and psychic mechanisms in action, naturally – to the extent the reduced image can excite the psychic sphere. For example, in *VEŠAT' LAPŠU NA UŠI* lit. to hang noodles on smb's ears ≈ to deceive impertinently – the perception is more vivid than in *BOK O BOK*; the perceptive image "flashes" in *PROTJANUT' NOGI* lit. to stretch one's legs ≈ turn up one's toes, whereas *OTDAT'*

*BOGU DUŠU* lit. to give back one's soul to God ≈ to die – brings about some mental idea which is experienced intellectually rather than sensually. The emotional evaluation differs from the rational one, the latter being immersed in the context of opinion, while the former kind of evaluation is located in the psychoemotional sphere, expressed by the predicates of feeling-attitude *nedobrenie*, *prezrenie*, *prenebreženie*, *uničiženie* (disapprobation, contempt, disdain, humiliation), etc. It is not accidental that dictionaries use these symbols for emotional “colouring” (although the number of the symbols and their interpretation vary from dictionary to dictionary). The emotional evaluation is registered in the form of subjective modality, e.g. “the speaker experiences a positive/negative feeling/attitude to the image, imagining / mentally visualizing the thing-meant, as if it were its figurative Gestalt” (Telija 1991a, 36-66). This formalism shows that it is similar to axiological (evaluative) modality, but (1) differs from it on the ontological qualities of predicates and variables, and (2) the form has the modality as if (als ob), which indicates pseudoreality. This leads us to at least two conclusions. The first: the emotional evaluation is implied by the figurative Gestalt (or its analogue). And the second: the existence in one meaning of the subjective modalities enhances and consequently emphasises the subjective factor of meaning, rendering the meaning expressive.

In order to separate two ontologically distinct kinds of subjective modality, the term emotiveness has been introduced to designate emotional evaluation. Emotiveness should be distinguished from affectation, expressing emotional reactions, and not feelings. The expressive effect is characteristic of meaning types (II): *Oni sražalisi' bok o bok/plečom k pleču* spoken with approbation. Expressiveness manifests itself the more vividly, the stronger the psychological tension between the denotation and the empirical image, retained (to a certain extent) in the figurative Gestalt structure. Thus, in the idiom *DROŽAT' NAD KAŽDOJ KOPEJKOJ* lit. to tremble over each penny ≈ to be very mean, the denotation of meaning points to an extremely economical person. In the naive picture of the world excessive thrift is assessed negatively, as it is akin to stinginess. The idea that X can behave in such a manner, as if “trembling over each penny”, evokes a feeling-attitude of disdain towards X both by the speaker and the addressee. The idiom *DROŽAT'/TRJASTIS'* (shake) *NAD KAŽDOJ KOPEJKOJ* has yet another meaning (Telija 1991b, 18-44) that can be represented by a procedural formalism, explicating all the macrocomponents, as well as their implications: X is excessively stingy, and it is ‘bad’, and the fact that X produces the impression, as if X were “trembling/shaking” over each penny, evokes contempt to X (on the part of the speaker and, as a result, of the addressee), and it is used colloquially.” It is obvious that expressiveness here is created by the rational evaluation, emotiveness and also – by the colloquial style (due to the figurative basis of the idiom). All these types of information must be retained in a traditional dictionary entry claiming to give an adequate description of meaning, e.g.: “Colloquial. To be pathologically stingy (spoken in a situation when it is important to emphasise excessive stinginess, bordering on pettiness). Contemptuous”. Idioms which retain the association with the figurative Gestalt, and hence with empirical image, are expressively coloured. In this case the figurative basis can be (a) simple, using one trope, or (b) complex, embracing a “trope mix”. Compare: (a) *VYJTI IZ OKOPOV* lit. to come out of trenches = to become aggressive after a period of inertness; *ZAPAHLO ŽARENYM* lit. it smells of smth burning ≈ it looks as if there's going to be a brawl; *TJANUT' ODEJALO NA SEBJA* lit. to pull the blanket onto oneself ≈ to do smth for one's own sake; and

(b) DROŽAT' NAD KAŽDOJ KOPEJKOJ where kopejka is a standard minimal sum of money; DAVAT' STO OČKOV VPERËD lit. to give 100 scores in advance = to have an edge over smb, where the metaphor is based on the metonymic transfer of the frame "a game of dice" with a hyperbole "100 scores". Apart from the empirical image, figurative motivation can make use of absurdities, jokes, alliterations, etc.: SOGNUT' V BARANIJ ROG lit. to bend into a sheep's horn ≈ to treat smb cruelly; ŠAPKAMI ZAKIDAT' lit. cast hats at sbm ≈ to win easily; POLETET' OT MAŠKI VVERH TORMAŠKI – alliteration, compare ≈ topsy-turvy. Emotional reaction can be also triggered by nonsensical sound symbols: TARY BARY DA RASTABARY ≈ chattering away. As it has already been mentioned, the figurative basis affects the stylistic connotations of idioms. Compare: informal: VEŠAT' LAPŠU NA UŠI; DO LAMPOČKI lit. to the light bulb ≈ (to be) indifferent to smth; METR S KEPKOJ lit. a meter with a cap ≈ too small (in height); and literary use: PEREJTI V MIR INOJ lit. to pass into another world ≈ to decease; VITAT' V OBLAKAH lit. to soar in the clouds ≈ to daydream; NOEV KOVČEG – Noah's arc. And that is quite reasonable: informal speech conditions do not impose restrictions on figurative associations, whereas formal ones oblige to observe the proprieties. Stylistically marked idioms, therefore, are also pragmatically loaded. Emotiveness along with rational evaluation and stylistic markedness create the pragmatic bloc of the idiom meaning. To choose a certain idiom is to perform a speech act. The awareness of the idiom motivation is at the basis of such a choice.

The motivation of idiomatic meaning is constituted not only by its empirical image – physically or mentally perceived through the medium of the figurative Gestalt structure, but also by its formal representation. It follows, then, that all the types of motivation are important for adequate dictionary explanations to ensure the understanding of idioms in texts. Motivation, as it has been noted, proves to be a rather complicated heterogeneous complex of associations, manifesting themselves in various uses of meaning. Strictly speaking, such associations, bound by usage, make up the connotative aspect of meaning (Telija 1986), which incorporates: 1. knowledge about a naive picture of the world pertinent to the denotation and referring to the frame in which the meaning is realized; 2. knowledge about the world referring to the frame which confines the "literal" meaning of the idiom and which is enacted in forming the Gestalt structure; 3. cultural knowledge about the country, history, traditions, etc. including the knowledge about symbolic and standard-setting functions of certain words as idiom components; 4. etymological data which may prove necessary to understand an idiom; 5. knowledge about the linguistic competence at all levels. Some other types of knowledge may also be required to clarify motivation, for example, territorial dissemination of an idiom, its diachronic peculiarities, etc.

Naturally, the number of motivation types to be included in a dictionary depends on its pragmatics – its orientation to the users. Nevertheless, the experience gained from the work on the package of phraseological data for the Computer fund of the Russian language (Frazeografija v Mašinnom fonde...1990) shows that the lexicographer must have at his/her disposal a data base arranged as a parametrical form, that is a list of phraseological parameters including, among others, motivational parameters for the adequate description of phraseological and idiomatic word-combinations. The form in question has already been worked out and provides the linguistic processing for CIDI (Computerized Ideographic Dictionary of Idioms) (Maket slovarnoj stat'i...1991). The CIDI form

has a zone of motivation as a set of parametrical features characterizing the inner and outer form of an idiom. The inner form is described by features bearing on the content plane of the meaning per se and on its functioning. Given below are motivational parameters for the description of idiomatic meanings (the examples are borrowed from the dictionary entries prepared for CIDI by M. L. Kovshova, Y. A. Ryseva, V. N. Telija, I. N. Cherkasova, I. G. Nosenko (Maket slovornoj stat'i... 1991) and manuscript materials of A.V. Doroshenko for THE ENGLISH-RUSSIAN DICTIONARY OF LIVING IDIOMS):

IMAGE-I awareness of physically perceived image typical of idioms BOK O BOK (I), (II), VEŠAT' LAPŠU NA UŠI, DOJNAJA KOROVA (milk cow), VYHODIT' IZ OKOPOV; compare the idioms which do not evoke a physically perceived image: SOBAKUS'EL (lit. one has eaten a dog = one knows his onions), NI BEL'MESA (nonsensical = (one understands) nothing at all).

IMAGE-II: awareness of a mentally perceived image, as in idioms like ZADAVAT' TON (= set the fashion), IGRAT' PERVUJU SKRIPKU (= play the first fiddle), NE OT MIRA SEGO (lit. not belonging to this world = queer), BEZ UMA (= crazy/wild about smb/smth), V KONCE KONCOV (= after all). It should be noted that idioms can combine physically perceived and mentally perceived awareness of the image (in this case CIDI indicates which component of the idiom is evoked by this or that way of perception). E.g. in IMAGE-I: BOLET' DUŠOJ (lit. to have a soul-ache = to worry about smb/smth) the kind of perception is determined by bolet'; ZA TRIDEVJAT' ZEMEL' (lit. beyond 27 lands = miles and miles away) – by zemlja (land); and in IMAGE-II: BOLET' DUŠOJ I SERDCEM by duša i srđce (soul and heart); ZA TRIDEVJAT' ZEMEL' – by tridevјat', etc.

IMAGE-III: indicates the sound-imitating or sound-symbolic nature of motivation: TARY BARY DA RASTABARY - the imitation of the sounds of speech; NI BEL'MESA - nonsensical sounds, associated with unintelligible speech.

SYMBOL: the presence of a lexical component in an idiom structure, which has a symbolic (or quasi-symbolic) meaning in a linguo-cultural setting, e.g. krov' a symbol of kinship which only occurs in this meaning in the idioms denoting kinship: RODNAJA KROV' lit. kin blood = belonging to one's kinfolk); UZY KROVI (lit. & fig. bonds of blood); KROV' OT KROVI (lit. blood from blood). Compare also krov' as a quasi-symbol of blood as vital power, vitality: KROV' IGRAET (lit. blood is playing); KROV' STYNET V ŽILAH (lit. blood gets frozen in one's veins); POTOM I KROV'JU (lit. with blood and sweat).

ETALON: the presence of a lexical component, which has the meaning of a standard or quasi-standard in a given linguo-cultural setting: kopejka, groš as standards for a minimal sum of money (compare: penny, farthing): DROŽAT' NAD KAŽDOJ KOPEJKOJ, DO POSLEDNEJ KOPEJKI (= to the last farthing); ÈTO STANET komu V KOPEČKU (= it will cost him a pretty penny); TRIDEVJAT' as a quasi-standard of a far-away distance (compare: miles): ZA TRIDEVJAT' ZEMEL'; veršok as a quasi-standard of low height: OT GORŠKA DVA VERŠKA (= too small).

ETYMON: etymological or cultural information about such words as tridevјat', groš or veršok in the above idioms; rožon in LEZT'/PERET' NA ROŽON (rožon – a forking stick for bear hunting); žar in ČUŽIMI RUKAMI ŽAR ZAGREVAT' (smouldering char-

coal); as well as the historical and cultural explanation of such idioms as MAMAEVO POBOIŠČE (the blood-shedding battle in which the Russians inflicted an invincible blow on a tartar khan Mamai's hords).

**MORFFORM:** the presence of morphological motivation. E.g.: ŠEVELIT' MOZGOM (lit. stir one's brains = use one's brains) and (delať čto) S UMOM (lit. to do smth with brains = to do smth knowledgeably) where mozgi and um are interpreted as a tool of thought. Compare also: VSEMI PEČENKAMI (lit. with all one's livers = making efforts); VSEM SERDCEM (lit. with one's whole heart = from the bottom of one's heart), where the awareness of the instrumental function is also felt.

**SYNTFORM:** the presence of syntactic motivation – constructions, word order, etc. E.g.: RYLOM NE VYŠEL (= one has a muzzle for a face) follows the pattern in which the verb is constant, and the object position is filled with a noun denominating a feature of the subject which characterizes it negatively (compare semi-idiomatic combinations rostom (height), biografiej (biography) ne vyšel). Syntactic motivation can stem from inversion: golova (N) sadovaja (Adj) (norm: Adj → N); gus' (N) lapčatyj (Adj) (norm: Adj → N). Other types of syntactic motivation are demonstrated by multiple negation: ni be, ni me, ni kukareku; ni živ, ni měrtv.

The motivation types can form different combinations within an idiom. E.g.: DUŠA NARASPAŠKU (lit. the soul unbuttoned) combines: IMAGE-I by naraspašku IMAGE-II by duša as a container of feelings; KAMEN' S DUŠI SVALILSJA (lit. a stone fell off one's soul) combines: IMAGE-I by kamen', IMAGE-II by duša, MORFFORM by the Perfective Past form of the verb to denote the result; OLUH CARJA NEBESNOGO (lit. the shepherd (in its obsolete form – oluh) of the Celestial God) combines: IMAGE-II by car' nebesnyj, IMAGE-III by oluh (sound association with lopuh ≈ fig. simpleton), SYNTFORM by inversion car' (N) nebesnyj (Adj) → N), entailing sense augment, ETYM: by oluh ← voluh (obs.) 'shepherd'.

Adequate understanding of idioms is of great importance to translators and interpreters. Most idioms are deeply rooted in the historical and cultural development of linguistic creativity, and understanding idioms requires not only the knowledge of semantics and connotations, but also the skill of finding an equivalent or analogueus idiom in one's native tongue which would retain the emotive impact. It is believed that the motivational parameters of idioms could prove useful in ensuring a more profound penetration into the nature of language, as well as a higher semantic, stylistic and pragmatic accuracy of explanation. Naturally, if an equivalent idiom completely coinciding with the target language idiom can be found in the language of translation, no lexicographic commentary may be needed. E.g.: SOBAKU NA SENE = THE DOG IN THE MANGER; DOJNA-JA KOROVA = THE MILK COW; SVODIT' KONCY S KONCAMI = TO MAKE BOTH ENDS MEET; VOSHVALJAT' DO NEBES = TO PRAISE TO THE SKIES, etc. Yet the application of parametrical form under discussion to the semantic analysis of analogues can help determine where their Gestalt structures overlap, and how they differ. In order to minimise the distinctions between idiomatic correspondences in different languages, translation dictionaries of idioms must include in their entries a commentary section, elucidating the semantic zone, over which the meanings of analogues do not overlap. Let us consider a few examples.

1. PROMOKNUT' DO NITKI ~ (GET) WET TO THE SKIN. The idiomatic analogues overlap in MORFFORM, but differ in their Gestalt structures by IMAGE-I: English – by skin, emphasising a bodily reaction and intensifying the effect: "to get wet + very much"; the Russian – by do nitki, emphasising the state of clothes. The Russian image, besides, makes use of ETALON nitka as a quasi-standard "measure" of clothes, thus bringing about augment in emotiveness.

2. GORA S PLEČ UPALA ~ TO LIFT A WEIGHT OFF ONE'S SHOULDERS. The Russian gora (mountain) makes use of ETALON as a quasi-standard for measuring a heavy burden (compare: GORA DEL lit. a mountain of things to do) and is hyperbolic as compared with the English weight. Therefore the Russian idiom presupposes relief from something more pressing than its English analogue.

3. VEŠAT' LAPŠU NA UŠI ~ TO PULL SMB'S LEG. These idioms, both using the physically perceptive IMAGE-I and having the meaning "to deceive", differ by the sense 'insolently' inherent in the Russian analogue. This probably results from the character of the Gestalt, which in Russian reflects an image of an absurd appearance implying insult. Although both the idioms are used informally, the Russian idiom is more insulting for a person and is used with obvious scorn, being loaded with emotiveness.

It can be concluded that the parametrical form worked out for the analysis of the motivation basis of the idiom semantics can serve as a reliable means for balancing the left and the right sides of the dictionary, thus ensuring correct understanding and use of idioms in texts.

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