

## Pragmatic Aspects of Age-related Idioms in English

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**Abstract:** the article examines pragmatic aspects of idioms, phraseological units that constitute thematic group «a person's age» in the English language. The article also considers the definition of the notion «a person's age», presents some quantitative data on the basis of chosen phraseological units in English language. The etymology of some figurative units is presented in the article as well. On the basis of the analysis deductions were made about the linguocultural peculiarities of English phraseological units.

**Keywords:** Pragmatics, Idioms. phraseological unit, a person's age, etymology.

Pragmatics (Greek pragma - action) is a branch of semiotics that studies the relationship between signs and their participants in a specific speech process. Today, pragmatics is considered as the level of language representatives expressing their attitude using certain words and semantic constructions and understanding the interlocutor's attitude, that is, reacting based on the existing situation.

Pragmatics is the study of meaning in relation to the context in which the person is speaking or writing. This includes social, situational, and textual contexts. Therefore, the relationship between linguistic form and communication function is an area of extreme importance in pragmatics.<sup>1</sup>

According to Neubert, the transfer of pragmatic meaning to translation occurs as follows<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Strässler, J. (1982). Idioms in English: A pragmatic analysis (Vol. 183). Gunter Narr Verlag

<sup>2</sup> Sattorov O. B. (2022). Tarjimada pragmatika tushunchasi va tarjimashunoslikda pragmatikaning o'рни//Science and Education. Scientific Journal. Volume 3 Issue 11.

- 1) high level of transfer to translation (scientific and technical literature, etc.);
- 2) migration with restrictions on translation (when preparing information-analytical materials for representatives of other languages);
- 3) the situation of the pragmatics of the original not being transferred to the translation (if the text is aimed only at representatives of a certain language).

According to Kathryn Rice, pragmatic meaning cannot be delivered in isolation. Translation should be in the interests of the customer<sup>3</sup>.

It seems that pragmatics is the subjective attitude of the language community to language units. The characteristics of their components in this relationship give rise to the concept of the pragmatic feature of language.

It should be noted that the concept of pragmatics in linguistics does not include only the concept of pragmatics of language combinations. This concept is quite broad and expresses the fact that one or another language depends on the diversity of the participants of the communicative process and the plot of the event, as well as on the competence of the participants.

The same word can be perceived differently by representatives of two different groups. For example, the combination of "getting to the truth" evokes a different image in people who have received the hadith of theological science, but it evokes a completely different image in ordinary people or outsiders. Pragmatic problems of language have been less researched than the study of referential evaluative meanings.

Idioms are generally defined as language-specific, relatively-fixed expressions where the meaning of the whole is not transparent from the meaning of the constituents of words.

Idioms are a colourful and fascinating aspect of English. They are commonly used in all types of language, informal and formal, spoken and written. Your language skills will increase rapidly if you can understand idioms and use them

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<sup>3</sup> Абдуллаев М.М. (2021). Прагматические аспекты изучения политического медиадискурса. Известия Саратовского университета. Новая серия. Серия Филология. Журналистика. №1. С. 27-32

confidently and correctly. One of the main problems students have with idioms is that it is often impossible to guess the meaning of an idiom from the words it contains. In addition, idioms often have a stronger meaning than non-idiomatic phrases.

A term used in grammar and lexicology to refer to a sequence of words which is semantically and often syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit. From a semantic viewpoint, the meanings of the individual words cannot be summed to produce the meaning of the idiomatic expression as a whole. From a syntactic viewpoint, the words often do not permit the usual variability they display in other contexts, e.g. “*it’s raining cats and dogs*” does not permit “*it’s raining a cat and a dog/dogs and cats*”, etc. Because of their lack of internal contrastivity, some linguists refer to idioms as ‘ready-made utterances’. An alternative terminology refers to idioms as ‘habitual collocations’.

The study of units of phraseological funds of various languages in a comparative aspect is one of the main directions of modern linguistic research. Researchers of phraseological material of both related and unrelated languages analyze the peculiarities of the semantics of phraseological units, their structural and grammatical composition, origin, role in the linguistic picture of the world in order to identify general patterns and distinctive features characteristic of the phraseological systems of the languages being studied. Such studies are of significant importance in determining interlingual phraseological correspondences and searching for ways to adequately transfer the semantics of phraseological units from one language to another, in the compilation of bilingual and multilingual phraseological dictionaries, in cognitive and linguocultural research.

The English language system includes idioms, phrases, phraseological units, proverbs and proverbs, and its vocabulary is also unique in its wealth of phrases, phraseological units and idioms. All of these appeared due to the social life and way of life of the people, and in their essence embody the culture, spirituality and views of this people, and carry these features from era to era and from generation to

generation. The structural components of idioms in the English language are made up of words belonging to different word groups, and this group of words becomes a means of expressing one meaning and/or one object in such a way as to form an idiomatic unit.

The specificity of phraseological units with the meaning of age is determined by the peculiarities of culture, traditional customs, living conditions and upbringing of the people.

A person's age can be correlated with such a philosophical category as life time, and this concept is fundamental for a person. Lifetime can be divided into periods that are truly important for a person: *birth - early youth - adulthood - marriageable age - childbearing period - maturity - harmony - old age - death*.

The concept of "age" in traditional society was filled with a special meaning, since it carried not so much quantitative as qualitative characteristics.

Having studied phraseological units with the meaning of age, we distributed them into the following semantic-thematic groups:

- phraseological units with the meaning "young" (in this group we included phraseological units with the designation of infancy, childhood);
- phraseological units with the meaning "coming of age" (in this group we also included phraseological units with the meaning of "marriageable age");
- phraseological units with the meaning of "middle age";
- phraseological units with the meaning of "old age" (in this group we also included phraseological units with the meaning of "old age").

In English, phraseological units denoting a person's age have positive and negative connotations. For example, phraseological units denoting *youth, youth, are positively colored in the prime of life 'in the prime of life' or on the right (sunny) side of the thirty (forty etc) 'under thirty, forty; and phraseological units of old age - on the contrary, for example: long in the tooth'. Old sand is pouring down', old bloke (buffer, card, codger) coll. neglected old man.*

At the present stage of development of linguistic science, many researchers show special interest in studying various issues of comparative phraseology of languages of different types. The interest of scientists in a detailed study of the phraseological composition of languages is due to the specifics of this area. Most researchers describe and characterize linguistic phenomena in close connection with a person, the peculiarities of his thinking and worldview, which is confirmed by a significant number of scientific works in the field of linguistics, which are carried out within the framework of such related fields of knowledge as linguoculturology, anthropolinguistics and psycholinguistics.

The phraseological fund of any language reflects customs and traditions, national cultural characteristics, as well as the mentality of those people who speak a given language. This work is devoted to the study of the characteristic features of phraseological units, the semantics of which contains information about a person's age.

The explanatory dictionary of the English language presents two meanings of the concept age:

“1) period, stage in the development, growth of someone or something (age of a person, animal, plant);

2) the amount of time lived, years”<sup>4</sup>.

When selecting phraseological units for this phraseosemantic group, we are guided by two meanings, but at the same time we consider only those phraseological units that are associated with a person's age.

It should be noted that the phraseosemantic group “person's age” is not numerous and has phraseological units in English, indicating the number of years lived by a person, as well as a certain period of a person's life. With age, every person experiences complex mental and psychological changes that affect his properties and qualities, his behavior, as well as his appearance.

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<sup>4</sup> John Ayto. Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms. - Oxford University Press. - 393 p

Thus, we believe that age always leaves its mark on a person's appearance. In the English language, 15 phraseological units have been identified, as well as 2 proverbs on the subject under study. Here are some examples of phraseological units of the English language:

*in the prime of life* - (in the best and most productive and healthy period of life); *ancient (or old) as the hills*; *old bloke/buffer/card/codger*; *knee high to a duck* (referring to when somebody was younger or even when he or she was a child) and so on.

Proverbs that characterize a person's age in English include 2 units that have the same meaning: *A woman is as old as she looks, but a man is never old till he quits looking*; *A man is as old as he feels and a woman as she looks*.

When studying the functional-stylistic aspect of the connotation of phraseological units of the thematic group "human age", the fact was revealed that most units belong to the colloquial style of speech. The study of the emotive component of connotation showed that many phraseological units have a variety of emotive marks, for example, playfulness:

*have one foot in the grave/ with one foot in the grave*; *be long in the tooth*; *to be old, often too old to do something*;

One phraseological unit of the English language refers to archaisms: *stricken in years (archaic) - elderly*.

It should be noted that this unit was used as a euphemism to characterize an old person.

Phraseological circulation of the English language *out of the ark* (англ. и австрал.) - *допотопный, старомодный (to be very old-fashioned)* belong to biblicalisms.

The lexeme "ark", which is part of the phraseological unit, refers to the ark built by Noah, in which he tried to save his family and each animal in pairs from the

great flood. The dictionary also indicates that the idiom has a limited area of use and is used mainly in the UK and Australia<sup>5</sup>.

English phraseological unit with a darkened internal *form be long in the tooth* is also of interest from the point of view of its origin. The dictionary entry provides a cultural reference explaining that the phraseological unit was originally used in relation to horses, since it is considered possible to determine the age of an animal by looking at its teeth. *The longer the teeth, the older the horse*.

Here are examples of the use of this expression in fiction: «*Whom have you got in mind or this committee?*» asked the squire abruptly. «*My father*», said Michael; «*and we'd thought of Marquess Of Shropshire*». «*Very long in the tooth*». «*But very spry*», said Sir Lawrence (J. Galsworthy, «*Swan Song*», part II, ch. VI) [1, c. 490]. «*He was too long in the tooth to fool round with dynamite, like talking about a big slug that didn't exist*» (K. S. Prichard, «*The Roaring Nineties*», ch. 56) [1, c. 490].

In our material, the phraseosemantic group designating the last age period in a person's life includes 51 phraseological units in the English language. According to scientists, this age period covers old age from 55-60 to 75 years, senile age from 75 to 90 years and the age of centenarians from 90 years and older [Medical Encyclopedia]. At the same time, the meaning of old age is clearly visible only in two phraseological units of the English language:

*The Darby and Joan club* – ‘club for older people’; *sugar daddy slang*. – ‘rich elderly admirer’; *in years* – elderly; *simple in years*. – elderly; *come out of age*, *come out of age outdated*.

The main composition of phraseological units relates to the characteristics of old age, which is reflected by the lexemes *old*, *old age*, *elderly* both in the component composition and in the definition of many phraseological units:

*old duck*” Australian decomposition – ‘old woman’; *gray (grey) hairs* – ‘old age’; *the sear, the yellow leaf* (*the sear and yellow, the sear and "the yellow" leaf*)

<sup>5</sup> Mieder, W. A. (1992). Dictionary of American Proverbs. 710 p. New York, Oxford University Press. (In English)

– ‘old age’; *in old age; venerable age, venerable years (years), in declining years (life, days); for gray hair.*

The above phraseological units, as well as a number of others, have in their component composition only the integral semes of age and old age without additional differential semes.

The well-known truths that old age comes unexpectedly and always has some manifestations are reflected in phraseology:

*old age comes uncalled; age is like love: it cannot hide.*

Just a few phraseological units describe the appearance of old people, and it is the presence of gray hair and the process of hair loss that are characteristic signs of old age, figuratively presented in the internal form of phraseological units:

*gray (grey) hairs (lit.: ‘gray hair’); fretting cares make gray hairs (lit.: ‘tormenting worries make hair gray’) – it is not work that ages, but care; like a gray-haired (white) harrier; gray hair does not spoil a beaver; It’s not the comb that scratches the head, but time – in old age the hair becomes scarce.*

At the same time, as the English proverb notes *old age makes us wiser and more foolish.*

Old age makes us not only wiser, but also more stupid, since old age is characterized not only by wisdom and greater life experience, but also by the gradual decline of a person’s mental abilities. This negative tendency (up to loss of reason from old age) is figuratively characterized as “*falling into childhood*” and, naturally, it could not help but be reflected in the phraseology of the English language:

*be in one’s second childhood – ‘fall into childhood’; old men are twice children (lit.: ‘old people are twice children’); once an old man, twice a child (lit.: ‘once an old man, twice a child’); fall into childhood, fall into childhood: – lose your mind from old age; to survive from memory, to survive from memory - to become forgetful from old age; to go out of your mind, to go out of your mind - to become stupid, to lose the ability to think sensibly, reason, etc. from old age’; fall into (in) infancy, - lose your mind from old age.*



In general, it should be noted that the number of English phraseological units, indicating a person's age, far exceeds the number of other language units. The uneven quantitative distribution of phraseological units of this group reveals differences in the national and cultural perception of a person's age, and also allows us to conclude that it is typical for English linguistic culture to pay more attention to the imprint that a person's age leaves on his external data.

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