



A Cognitive Approach in Studying the Concept “Wealth” in Idioms

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Abstract: The article discusses the notion of idioms as the object of study. The idioms representing the concept “wealth” are analyzed cognitively and semantically by the help some examples taken from the dictionaries in English, Russian and Uzbek languages.

Key words: idiom, concept, semantically, figurative meaning, non-literal meaning, idiomatic meaning.

An idiom is made up of several words, which has relatively fixed structure and rich meaning including both literal meaning and idiomatic meaning. Idioms play a crucial and indispensable role in language acquisition that makes language more colourful and meaningful. They are considered the treasure of the language, cultural and historical sediment and also fundamental existence in people’s daily communication. Idioms occur in all languages that are largely related to nationalities, historical development, custom, religious belief, myths and legends. Aside from providing objective information and describing objective world, idioms can be used to express personal feelings and opinions. According to the most common definitions, idioms are expressions in the usage of a language that is peculiar to themselves either in having a meaning that can not be derived from the conjoined meanings of their elements [3].

According to other sources, idioms are phrases or expressions that typically present a figurative, non-literal meaning attached to the phrase. Some phrases which become figurative idioms, however, do retain the phrase's literal meaning. Categorized as formulaic language, an idiom's figurative meaning is different from the literal meaning.[4]

As phenomenon idioms are controversial and difficult to account for. Serious discussions on idioms in western linguistics started in the 1950s. The difficulty of defining ‘idiom’ might be a reason as to why this is such a recent field of study. Most linguists define idioms from different linguistic perspectives and discuss various views that are sometimes controversial to each other in their articles and books such as Sweet (1899), Hockett (1958), Malkiel, Y. (1959), Katz and Postal (1963), Healey (1968) Chafe (1968), Weinreich (1969), Fraser (1970), Makkai (1972), and Chomsky (1980), Strässler (1982), Andreas Langlotz (2006) and et al.

Strässler emphasizes that constructing a theory of idioms presents a challenge. Malkiel writes “... one does well to steer clear of any reference to the ill-defined category of ‘idioms or phraseological formulas. These have been variously spoken of as sequences yielding imperfectly to routine grammatical analysis, as passages strikingly rebellious to literal translation [...], as semi-autonomous pieces of congealed syntax [...], as word-groups whose aggregate meaning cannot be fully predicted even from thorough knowledge of each ingredient (a semantic approach), and, in stylistic or esthetic terms, as clichés, i.e., as combinations once suffused with fresh metaphoric vigor, but gradually worn thin by dint of use.”

Charles Hockett who was the first western linguist to deal with idioms explains that the idiomatic status of a form depends on its function in relation to other forms it co-occurs with. From this it follows that idioms are not particular forms, but rather functions or particular occurrences of forms, e.g., “[...] *new* is an idiom in *She wants a new hat*, but not in *I’m going to New York*, because here it is part of the larger idiom *New York*” Thus, any linguistic form from a morpheme to a larger sentence construction can constitute an idiom [5,6].

Hockett also asserts that an idiom can only be understood if its meaning is learned as additional information to language, i.e., conventionality. The latter statement is still credited today but more recent definitions of idioms cover a smaller range of expressions than Hockett describes. [5,6]

Andreas Langlotz discusses in his book *Idiomatic Creativity* (2006) the core properties of idioms, such as conventionalization, compositeness and (non)compositionality. These are properties that will be discussed throughout this thesis. Though Langlotz assigns noncompositionality as a basic property of idioms, he is also concerned with including other linguistic aspects in idiom interpretation: “[...] idiomatic constructions can be described as complex symbols with specific formal, semantic, pragmatic and sociolinguistic characteristics.” (Langlotz, 2006: 3). He also explains that a phrase can only be defined as idiomatic by exploring its “degree of idiomaticity, i.e., its degree of belonging to the class of idiomatic constructions.” (Langlotz, 2006: 5). Since idioms change appearance from one instance to another, they must be analyzed accordingly. Consequently, there cannot be one single definition that would cater for all idioms [5,5]

A similar view is defended by Nunberg et al. (1994). They argue that “[...] idioms occupy a region in a multidimensional lexical space, characterized by a number of distinct properties: semantic, syntactic, poetical, discursive and rhetorical.” They also assert that idioms display a great number of properties, but not every single idiom displays every property. Idioms may show degrees of inflexibility, some type of figuration, they are proverbial, often used in informal situations and they are used to express evaluation of situations. What sets these linguists aside is their claim that the feature of noncompositionality in idioms is inconclusive. The authors subdivide idioms into two types: those whose meaning cannot be predicted on the basis of their constituent parts and those whose meaning can be predicted from their constituents [5,9].

Idioms are usually treated as a category and investigated in Cognitive linguistics by interpreting language as the presentation of concepts. This investigation involves exploring hypotheses about reason, implications of human experience for language and also conceptual systems. One way to understand the relation between language and human cognition is to understand the way in which people categorize objects and events in the world.

According to traditional categorization, also known as the classical view, categories are transcendental and they shape the world. An alternative view presents categories as rooted in people’s experience, whence the world shapes categories.

Taking into consideration the above mentioned, in this article we’d like to categorize the idioms representing the concept “wealth”. There are a lot of idioms in English representing the concept “wealth” and they are given in both Russian and Uzbek languages to compare with the following examples:

Example № 1. *A wealth of information*

Meaning: a very large of vast amount of something

English: *The literature contains a wealth of information on the differences between spoken and written language.*

Russian: *В литературе содержится огромное количество информации о различиях между устной и письменной речью.*

Uzbek: *Bu adabiyot og‘zaki hamda yozma nutq orasidagi farqlar haqida juda boy ma’lumotga egadir.*

Example № 2. *Be rolling in wealth*

Meaning: to be extremely rich; to enjoy the benefits or luxuries of great wealth

English: If they can afford a yacht, it means they **are rolling in wealth**.

Russian: *Если они могут позволить себе яхту, значит, они купаются в богатстве.*

Uzbek : *Agar ular yaxta sotib olish imkoniyatlari bor ekan, demak ularda boylik haddan ziyod.*

Example № 3. *Health is better than wealth*

Meaning: it is more beneficial to be healthy than to be rich

English: *What can you do with all that money if you're deathly ill, though? That's why I think that health is definitely better than wealth.*

Russian: *Но что вы можете сделать со всеми этими деньгами, если вы смертельно больны? Вот почему я думаю, что здоровье определенно лучше, чем богатство.*

Uzbek: *Agar o'linga duchor bo'lsangiz, shuncha pul bilan nima qila olasiz? Shuning uchun menimcha, salomatlik, albatta, boylikdan afzaldir.*

Example № 4. *Share the wealth; spread the wealth*

Meaning: to share a portion of something valuable or desirable with others

English: *They are quite wealthy, but they will not share their wealth with their family members.*

Russian: *Они довольно богаты, но не будут делиться своим богатством с членами семьи.*

Uzbek : *Ular juda boy, lekin ular o'z boyliklarini oila a'zolari bilan baham ko'rishmaydi.*

Example № 5. *Wealth beyond the/any dream of avarice*

Meaning: wealth that is greater than one could ever imagine, hope for, or spend the entirety of

English: *It is that workmen have seen this country revealing a wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.*

Russian: *Дело в том, что рабочие видели, как эта страна раскрывает богатство, превосходящее мечты алчности.*

Uzbek: *Gap shundaki, ishchilar bu mamlakatda haddan ziyod boylikni ko'rishdi .*

If we analyze the examples above, we can see positive and negative representation of the concept “wealth”. For instance, Example № 1 shows positive representation of the concept “wealth” with the meaning a very large of vast amount of something and there are other variations of this idiom such as *a wealth of experience, a wealth of material, a wealth of meaning, a wealth of expertise* and etc.

Example № 2 (*Be rolling in wealth/ roll-in-wealth*) represents both positive and negative meaning of the concept “wealth” in the following examples depending on the context and the words in the sentences make the idiom negative or positive or neutral.

Example № 2.1. English: *The corrupt politicians and businessmen of this country are rolling in wealth while the greater majority struggle to feed our families. It is time we took action!* (the words representing negativity such as *corrupt politicians and businessmen, struggle*) (negative)

Russian. *Коррумпированные политики и бизнесмены этой страны купаются в богатстве, в то время как подавляющее большинство изо всех сил пытается прокормить свои семьи. Пришло время принять меры!*

Uzbek: *Bu mamlakatning korrupsion siyosatchilari va tadbirkorlari boylik to'plashiyotgan paytda ko'pchilik esa oilalarini boqish uchun kurashmoqda. Harakat qilish vaqti keldi!*

Example № 2.2. English: *My girlfriend's family has been rolling in wealth for years. I don't know what I can offer her that she doesn't have already.* (neutral)

Russian: *Семья моей девушки богатая уже много лет. Я не знаю, что я могу предложить ей, чего у нее нет.*

Uzbek: *Sevgan qizimning oilasi ancha yillardan beri boy. U qizda yo'q nima taklif qilishni bilmayman.*

There are a few synonyms of the idiom *rolling in wealth* such as *fat cat*, *well-heeled*, *well-to-do*, *well-off* and etc.

Example № 4. The idiom *share/spread the wealth* carries a neutral representation of the concept “wealth” which describes *to share one's money, goods, etc., with other people*. The example below shows that the concept “wealth” means as *ripen fruits*.

English: *If your garden is overflowing, be a good neighbour and spread the wealth. (positive)*

Russian: *Если ваш сад переполнен, будьте хорошим соседом и распространяйте богатство.*

Uzbek: *Bog'ingiz to'lib-toshgan bo'lsa, yaxshi qo'shni bo'lib, boylikni tarqating.*

Example № 5. The word *avarice* in the idiom *wealth beyond the/any dream of avarice* means *an extremely strong desire for money and possessions* and carries a negative meaning. That's why the word *avarice* makes the word *wealth* negative in the context.

English: *After winning the lottery, I was suddenly rich beyond any dream of avarice, but it didn't make me any happier.*

Russian: *Выиграв в лотерею, я внезапно разбогател сверх всякой жадности, но от этого я не стал счастливее.*

Uzbek: *Lotereyada yutganimdan so'ng, men to'satdan juda ham boyib ketdim, lekin bu meni baxtiyor etmadi.*

The main focus in this article is on flexibility of idioms related to the concept “wealth” though the linguistic and semantic meanings with cognitive approach.

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