

**THE HISTORICAL ORIGIN OF ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS
WITH AN ORNITHONYM COMPONENT
INGLIZ TILIDAGI ORNITONIM KOMPONENTLI FRAZEOLOGIK
BIRLIKLARNING TARIXIY KELIB CHIQISHI**

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Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqola qush nomlarini (ornitonimlarni) o'z ichiga olgan ingliz idiomalari va iboralarining tarixiy ildizlarini o'rganadi. Madaniy in'ikoslar, folklor va qushlarning xatti-harakatlariga oid amaliy kuzatishlar vaqt o'tishi bilan ushbu iboralarning ma'nosi va qo'llanilishini qanday shakllantirganini o'rganadi. Tanlangan ornitonimlarga asoslangan idiomalarning etimologiyasini kuzatish orqali ushbu tadqiqot til, madaniyat va tabiat o'rtasidagi rivojlanayotgan munosabatlarni yoritishga qaratilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: Ingliz tilidagi idiomalar, ornitonimlar, madaniyat, folklor, iboralar, amaliy kuzatishlar, madaniy in'ikoslar, ma'nolar, iboralar.

Abstract : This paper explores the historical roots of English idioms and phrases that incorporate bird names (ornithonyms). It examines how cultural perceptions, folklore, and practical observations of avian behavior have shaped the meanings and usage of these expressions over time. By tracing the etymology of selected ornithonym-based idioms, this study aims to shed light on the evolving relationship between language, culture, and the natural world.

Key words: English idioms, ornithonyms, culture, folklore, phrases, practical observations, cultural perceptions, meanings, expressions.

INTRODUCTION

Phraseological units, commonly known as idioms, enrich language by conveying complex meanings in a concise and often colorful manner. Among the diverse categories of idioms, those featuring animal names hold a particular fascination. This paper focuses on idioms incorporating ornithonyms – bird names – in the English

language. Birds have long held symbolic significance in human cultures, representing a wide range of concepts from freedom and peace to cunning and ill omen. Consequently, their names have been readily adopted into idiomatic expressions, reflecting and reinforcing these cultural associations. Understanding the historical origins of these idioms provides valuable insights into the evolving relationship between humans, language, and the natural world.

This study employs an etymological approach, tracing the origins and development of selected English idioms containing ornithonyms. Data is gathered from historical dictionaries, etymological resources, and folklore studies. The analysis focuses on identifying the initial contexts in which these idioms emerged, the cultural perceptions of the birds involved, and the semantic shifts that have occurred over time.¹

"Early Bird Gets the Worm": This proverb, meaning that those who arrive first have the best chance of success, likely originated from practical observations of bird behavior. Birds that wake early are more likely to find food. The earliest recorded instance is from John Ray's "A Collection of English Proverbs" (1670). The idiom reflects a value placed on diligence and promptness.

"As Free as a Bird": This idiom, denoting a state of complete freedom and independence, draws upon the perceived ability of birds to fly unconstrained. While the exact origin is difficult to pinpoint, the association of birds with freedom dates back to ancient times. The phrase highlights the human desire for liberation and escape from restrictions.

"Kill Two Birds with One Stone": Meaning to accomplish two things with a single action, this idiom's origin is less clear. Some speculate it arose from hunting practices, while others suggest a metaphorical interpretation of efficiency. The idiom demonstrates a value placed on resourcefulness and achieving multiple goals simultaneously.²

"A Little Bird Told Me": This phrase, used to indicate that one has learned a secret from an unnamed source, has roots in folklore and mythology. Birds are often depicted as messengers or possessors of secret knowledge. The idiom adds an element of mystery and intrigue to the disclosure of information.

The historical origins of English ornithonym-based idioms reveal a complex interplay of observation, cultural symbolism, and linguistic evolution. Many idioms reflect practical knowledge of bird behavior, while others draw upon established cultural associations. The meanings of these idioms have often shifted over time, reflecting changes in societal values and perceptions of the natural world.

¹ Ray, John. A Collection of English Proverbs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1670.

² Skeat, Walter William. An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882.

The material for this study was an extraction of phraseological units with an ornithonym component from the Instagram social network, which is the most commonly used among people with different background. To compile the extraction and determine the frequency of use of a particular phraseological unit, the automated search by tags directly on the Instagram network was used. Additionally, we used such social networks promoting applications as smmbox.com and frisbuy.ru, which allow to find posts by tags or words. As it turned out, these applications can be successfully applied in linguistic research, thanks to the function of detecting text or post on a social network by a given phrase. Using quantitative analysis methods helped to identify phraseological modifications of the corresponding models among all phrases selected from the Instagram network.

Phraseological units are endowed with associative and symbolic meanings, due to this fact they reflect the culture of the people speaking the language, which means their image is based on cultural and historical semantics. The significance of English phraseological units is constantly successfully investigated on the material of modern English literature, press and advertising. In this study, an attempt is made to study phraseological units with the ornithonym component on the material of posts in social networks, which allows us to find such units that are used and changed in the modern language, by absolutely different people. The purpose of this study is to identify the frequency of use of certain phraseological units with the ornithonym component in English, as well as to find out different types of their variations.³

The issue of phraseological modifications and transformation has been studied by many scientists. According to Dobrovolsky D. O. "variability and transformability of phraseological units are the characteristics not only of their contextual use, but are established in the very nature of their meanings known by a native speaker". As sustainability is one of the key features of phraseological units, change of their structure and semantics is always related to communicative and pragmatic factors. This fact causes great interest among researchers.

Scientists operate with the following terms talking about different variants of phraseological units: phraseological variations, phraseological transformations and phraseological modifications. The first term, phraseological variation, is used as a general term and relates to all types of changes phraseological units undergo. Thus, the terms phraseological transformation and phraseological modification should be considered as types of variations.

Ramon M. S. distinguishes the following five types of variations: lexical substitution, lexical insertion, truncation, grammatical transformation, transcategorization.

³ Partridge, Eric. A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English New York: Macmillan, 1984.

Heinonen T. R. in his turn defines three main types: grammatical, lexical, constructional variations. According to scientists, lexical variations are considered to be the most common types of transformation and lexical variants can even be found in dictionaries .

Maslova N. E. compiles a consolidated classification of transformations and identifies phonetic, morphological, lexical and syntactic variations of phraseological units. Lexical variations in their turn include the following types: double actualization, components substitution, word order change. Syntactic variations include the following: inversion, extension of the componential composition of the phraseological unit, distancing of the components, etc.

Scientists such as Alifirenko N.F., Shansky N.M., Dobrovolsiy D.O. consider the following three types of modifications:

- condensation - or compression, is a word created by contraction of phraseological combination in one word;
- literalization - use of phraseological unit in its literal meaning;
- contamination - mixing of two phraseological units.

According to Gvozdarev U.A. there are also three types of modifications: lexical - phraseological, semantic, syntactic -phraseological modifications .

One and the same phraseological unit can be subjected to several types of transformations, so in this research we are going to use a combination of the abovementioned classifications.

A great number of phraseological units with an ornithonym component is used in social networks, which proves that this group of units are active and productive in the modern English language. In this research, we consider those phraseological units that undergo this or that type of phraseological transformation.

Phraseological unit get your ducks in a row which means to be well prepared or well organized for something that is going to happen was used 43 983 times. Of course, not all of them are really related to the situation they were used, many of them are used without any connection to the idea presented in the picture or text posted. The most common version of this phraseological unit is ducks in a row is an example of reduction or clipping, and this very version also undergoes literalization and is very often used in its direct meaning, for example, simply under a photo of ducks.

It feels like I have my ducks in a row...but the truth is I have no idea where my ducks even are. In this example, we can observe, firstly, the extension of the componential composition of phraseological unit, secondly, in the second part of the statement, we see a word play that is built on the word "duck" which is a key image of this unit.⁴

⁴ Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

One more example: I don't have ducks, or a row... I have squirrels and they are everywhere. Syntax changes such as the extension of the componential composition and replacement of phraseological unit components are also clearly highlighted here. At the same time, this unit is perceived both as a figurative and free expression, so we can say that double actualization is implemented here.

Ducks in a disorderly row. In this variation of phraseological unit, we can observe the distancing of the components, which is a type of syntactic transformation. In addition, the extension of the componential composition by adding the word "disorderly" changes the meaning of the phrase to the exact opposite, indicating a lexical modification. Another example of a lexical modification that was made by replacing the key component is Get your donuts in a row! which also includes an example of double actualization. This form of the phraseological unit is used in an advertising post, the author wants to bring two ideas to the reader through this phrase: the first, includes figurative meaning which is endowed with the initial form of unit "to have a snack to get organized", the second is represented by its direct meaning.

Another expression which was especially popular due to the President elections 2020 in the United States is *Lame duck*, which means an unsuccessful person, thing, or organization; or an elected official whose power is reduced because the person who will replace them has already been elected [3]. The second meaning of the idiom is much more widespread nowadays. It was used 4985 times in the analyzed website and the following transformations were detected.

The *lamest duck* is an example of morphological variation, where the grammatical form of the PU was changed in order to add the expressiveness to the utterance.

One more interesting example is 2020 menu: *Cooked goose or a lame duck*. In this example, the author employs a contamination technique by combining two phraseological units in one phrase. The first one is the abovementioned *lame duck*, the second is *cook somebody's goose* (to do something that spoils someone's plans and prevents them from succeeding) which was shortened to the form of the *cooked goose* (spoilt plans).

One more phraseological unit which we would like to discuss is *Early bird catches the worm*. This unit is used to advise someone that they will have an advantage if they do something immediately or before anyone else does it [3]. Transformations and modifications which this unit undergoes also prove that the key image of the phrase is built on the ornithonym component. The most prevalent modification found is compression, as the unit is mostly reduced to the form of the "early bird". Other variations found are the following: *Early bird catches CAT* - substituting the component "worm" the author wants to say that he had to wake up early to get his

computer tomography, so uses the phrase's figurative meaning partly. Two more examples with the similar transformations are: Early bird catches the photo; Early bird catches nothing. Both examples show the substitution of the last component of the phraseological unit.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration of English phraseological units containing ornithonyms provides a fascinating glimpse into the intricate relationship between language, culture, and the natural world. These idioms, far from being mere linguistic curiosities, serve as repositories of historical knowledge, cultural beliefs, and evolving perceptions of avian life. From the practical wisdom embedded in "the early bird gets the worm" to the symbolic resonance of being "as free as a bird," these expressions encapsulate a wealth of human experience. By tracing their etymological roots, we uncover the dynamic processes through which observations of the natural world are transformed into enduring linguistic forms. Further research into this area promises to yield even deeper insights into the rich tapestry of English language and its enduring connection to the avian realm. The continued study of these idioms is vital for understanding not only the evolution of language but also the shifting cultural attitudes towards the environment and the creatures that inhabit it.

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