

HEALTH AND DISEASE IDIOMS: A COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Стаття присвячена дослідженню англomовних ідіоматичних виразів, що позначають стан людини в нормі та при патології. Відзначено, що семантична структура ідіоматичних виразів вмотивована глибинними механізмами концептуальних метафор. Розглянуто основні концептуальні метафори, що знайшли відображення в аналізованому лексичному матеріалі. Використання здобутків когнітивної лінгвістики є продуктивним під час вивчення іноземної мови, зокрема, при засвоєнні англomовної ідіоматики студентами вищих медичних навчальних закладів.

Ключові слова: *метафора, концепт, вихідний домен, цільовий домен, ідіома, медичний дискурс, історія хвороби.*

The article investigates English idioms denoting the human condition in health and disease. It is noted that the semantic structure of idiomatic expressions is motivated by underlying mechanisms of conceptual metaphors. The basic conceptual metaphors, reflected in the analyzed lexical material, have been considered. The application of achievements in cognitive linguistics is productive in the course of learning a foreign language, particularly in mastering the English idiomology by students of higher medical educational institutions.

Keywords: *metaphor, concept, source domain, target domain, idiom, medical discourse, case history.*

Problem definition and its association with scientific and practical tasks.

Conceptual metaphors concentrate the most essential features of a particular world view [11: 205]; they configure our understanding of the world, triggering both lexical and textual creativity. The role of metaphor has been much studied in recent years, at every level of language and particularly in everyday communication [6; 8; 12]. Metaphor is a powerful cognitive mechanism that “can be found in specialized language texts as well as those in general language” [6: 585].

Analysis of recent research and publications on the subject.

Psycholinguistic research has shown that conceptual metaphors partly motivate our use of certain idiomatic phrases. In this context, it should be noted that conceptual metaphors often come to a focus of researchers’ attention as a means of streamlining

the process of understanding and remembering idioms [2; 4; 5; 10]. That is to say, the meaning of phraseological unit can be discovered by tracing the links between the source and target domains [3: 330]. This aspect is potentially productive in the process of mastering a foreign language.

The prevalence of idioms in spoken and written discourse quite logically leads to the search for ways to systemize and organize them. Phraseological units are endowed with stable structure and quite often have a completely unpredictable meaning which preconditions their complexity while mastering a foreign language. However, phraseological units are essential for the comprehensive worldview understanding. As a matter of fact, the semantic structure of phraseological units is motivated by underlying mechanisms of conceptual metaphors [4: 13]. The cognitive perspective sheds light on our conceptualization of reality, based on the empirical experience of everyday reality. For example, the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY underlies such idioms as “to go through life with eyes closed”; “to take an unexpected direction (of life)”; “to be at a crossroads”; “to pass away”; “cross the bridge when one comes to it”; “to be over the hill” and others [11: 210].

The cognitive approach to the study of idioms can facilitate the understanding of idiomatic expressions, providing a meaningful context and thus optimizing the process of remembering. Appeal to the conceptual metaphor provides a systematic approach to the study of idiomatic expressions and enables students to see that idiomatic meanings are not entirely arbitrary. Consequently, phraseological units form a consistent, coherent system of metaphorical concepts. The study of conceptual metaphors enables students to discover the logic of a foreign language.

The aim and materials. To our opinion, organizing idioms on the basis of cognitive mechanisms is potentially productive in the process of learning foreign languages at medical institutions. The aim of the research is to analyze the English idioms denoting the human condition in health and disease within the framework of medical discourse. Health and disease idioms are widely used in patients’ accounts of their experience related to diseases, as well as in physicians’ narratives about the performed treatment. The material of the research is the corpus of case histories and

concilium transcripts [13]. It is our belief that study of health and disease idioms from the perspective of their motivation by cognitive metaphors will disclose the underlying nature of doctor-patient communication and thus facilitate the process of diagnostics and treatment. Cognitive approach is capable of enhancing the doctor's understanding of patient's individuality. Thus, it can provide medical students with additional insights into their future profession. By analyzing the language people use, it will be possible to increase the effectiveness of communication between the doctors and patients.

The principal data of the study. To begin with, it is necessary to mention the opposition “up / down” as one of the most archaic cognitive mechanisms prevailing in many cultures. The vertical structure of human body determines the significance of this axis: spatial orientations “arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment” [11: 14]. As a matter of fact, this opposition is rooted in the polarity of heaven and earth, the top and the root of the World Tree, etc. In this context, “down” is traditionally associated with passivity, illness and death. By contrast, “up” is associated with health, physical strength, and vigour. As a result, the “up / down” opposition is conceptualized into one of the most essential metaphors in medical discourse – HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP / SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN; STRENGTH IS UP / WEAKNESS IS DOWN. In such idioms as “back on one's feet”, “right as rain” (to be healthy, especially after having been ill for a period of time) the upright position is conceptualized as the condition of well-being. Consequently, the overhead position also signifies the top of physical potential (e.g., “to be at the peak of one's powers”). Hence, the sentences “He's at the peak of health”; “He's in top shape”; “As to his health, he's way up there”, etc. attribute to physically healthy people.

By contrast, the SICKNESS AND WEAKNESS ARE DOWN metaphor is also vividly represented in such idioms as “to be under the weather” (to feel sick, tired or exhausted); “to feel run down” (to be in poor condition); “to come down with something (cancer, a cold, flu)” (to become sick with something, to catch an illness); “to be in declining health”; “to undergo an operation”; “go under the knife”. Thus,

such expressions as “He fell ill”; “He’s sinking fast”; “He came down with the flu”; “His health is declining” and so on – imply that serious diseases force people to lie down physically. One can find such idioms in clinical findings: “The patient *was in declining health* for 10 years prior to admission with recurrent upper respiratory infections characterized by fever, cyanosis”; “The patient *came down* with the same illness just as his sister began her recovery” [13].

TREATING ILLNESS IS FIGHTING A WAR is a common metaphor which has already been identified by researchers [1]. Within the framework of this metaphor, the source domain is “war”; the target domain is “illness, treatment, medicine”. The TREATING ILLNESS IS FIGHTING A WAR metaphor produces a wide range of military subcategories: THE DISEASE IS AN ENEMY; THE BODY IS A BATTLEGROUND (“His body was under siege by AIDS”; “He was attacked by an unknown virus”); MEDICINE IS A WEAPON; THE IMMUNE SYSTEM IS A DEFENSE; WINNING THE WAR IS BEING CURED OF THE DISEASE (“Beating measles takes patience”); BEING DEFEATED IS DYING (“The patient finally gave up the battle”) and so on.

DISEASE IS A MOVING OBJECT is yet another important cognitive metaphor in the medical discourse. This metaphor underlies such idioms as “to pick up a cold/influenza” (to acquire an illness); “to take sick”; “get sick with”; “to get a cold”; “to catch one’s death of cold”; “to catch hepatitis”; “to run a fever / to run a temperature” (to have a higher than normal body temperature); “to run in the family” (to be a common family characteristic). Hence, the DISEASE IS A MOVING OBJECT metaphor motivates the following anamnestic data: “This illness *has been running in my family* for a past half century”; “This disease *runs in families*, although it may skip generations”; “The disease *runs in my family* and other members have inherited it as well” [13].

In physician’s daily practice one can often find such expressions as “to trace the symptoms back to the cause of the disease” [13]. As one can easily observe, this statement is also based on the metaphor A DISEASE IS A MOVING OBJECT. In other words, a disease is conceptualized as an object which travels along some kind

of path, thereby leaving a track that can be perceived by external observers. In this context, explaining the cause of disease is equivalent to retracing the departure point of a moving object.

Yet another interesting metaphor is PEOPLE ARE CONTAINERS. People tend to perceive their bodies in 3-dimensional form: an inside, a boundary, and an outside [15]. Correspondingly, “we conceptualize the interior of the body as a kind of space or container, which consists of many entities: mind, soul, words, emotions, thoughts, etc.” [15: 186]. Furthermore, in the western discourse it is generally believed that “what is inside is more important than the physical body (outside): Beauty is only skin deep (appearances are deceptive)” [15: 186]. Consequently, there is a strong opposition between “in” and “out” locations. As a matter of fact, the PEOPLE ARE CONTAINERS metaphor underlies such idioms “to be bursting with health”; “to be full of energy” (to be full of vigour, full of vitality). Besides, human health is conceptualized as a physical container through the following idioms: “to be out of health (out of condition, out of shape)”; “to be knocked out” (to be extremely tired and/or unable to do anything); “to be worn-out”; “to burn (oneself) out” (to become very tired and almost sick from working too hard); “break out in (something)” (to begin showing a rash or other skin disorders). Medical discourse displays numerous cases of using these idioms: “Anytime I took those drugs, I *was completely knocked out*. For days”; “The woman *was out of health*, and had been losing flesh latterly”; “*I broke out in a rash* all over my body” [13].

The analyzed discourse also displays multiple examples of the LIFE IS MOVEMENT metaphor. Within the framework of medical discourse, active movement is regarded as a sign of perfect health, while illness assumes inactivity and immobility. For instance, this metaphor underlies such idioms as “alive and kicking” (to be well and healthy); “to kick a habit” (to break or stop a bad habit); “up and about” (healthy and moving around, as opposed to being confined to bed).

Moreover, there are vivid manifestations of the LIFE IS A GARDEN metaphor. In fact, being in very good health is conceptualized as “blossoming”: “to be in the prime of life”; “to be in prime”; “to be in the green”; “to be in blooming

health”; “to be in the pink (of condition; of health)”; “to be in the flower of strength”. Medical discourse suggests a wide range of such idioms: “I recovered completely from my surgery and have been *in the pink* ever since”; “I was lively and active and *in the pink of condition*”; “I wasn’t well last week, but I’m back *in the pink*, I’m pleased to say”; “It was almost a miracle that after his bout with pneumonia, he was back *in the pink of health*” [13]. By contrast, illness is regarded as fading and withering: “illness has withered him”; “his health is fading”; “faded cheeks”; “fading skin”; “His health languished, worrying his family members and friends” [13].

One more cognitive mechanism, underlying the idioms in medical discourse is the metaphor of time. As a matter of fact, this concept occupies quite an important place in the context of English-speaking worldview: “time is a commodity in the modern Western industrialized culture” [11: 7]. This idea is represented in English through the following metaphors: TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE, TIME IS MONEY and TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY. These metaphors are embodied in such sentences as: “You’re wasting my time”; “I don’t have the time to give you”; “How do you spend your time these days?”; “I’ve invested a lot of time in this project” and so on.

As to the medical discourse, the metaphor of time motivates the following idioms: “to live on borrowed time” (to continue living after a point at which you might easily have died); “to be given a new lease of life” (an occasion when you become more energetic and active than before). As one can easily observe, time is considered as a valuable source of life which can be obtained in limited quantities only. The given idioms can be found in patients’ accounts: “Since my cancer was diagnosed, I feel as if I am *living on borrowed time*”; “Within a few sessions my back pain was gone and I *was given a new lease of life*”; “To say that I *was given a new lease of life* would be a great understatement <...> I now feel liberated and have the confidence to go out and enjoy myself” [13].

Research findings and challenges in the examined area. Thus, cognitive metaphors relating to health and disease idioms in medical discourse are: HEALTH AND LIFE ARE UP / SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE DOWN; STRENGTH IS UP /

WEAKNESS IS DOWN; DISEASE IS A MOVING OBJECT; PEOPLE ARE CONTAINERS; LIFE IS MOVEMENT; LIFE IS A GARDEN and TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY / A LIMITED RESOURCE. These metaphors motivate numerous idioms both in patients' and physicians' narratives. The study of health and disease idioms from the perspective of their motivation by cognitive metaphors has the significant potential to promote the linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competence of medical students. The analysis of communicative mechanisms of professional interaction between health workers and patients is an important part of training future doctors.

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ВІДОМОСТІ ПРО АВТОРА

Юлія Лисанець – кандидат філологічних наук, викладач кафедри іноземних мов з латинською мовою та медичною термінологією ВДНЗУ “Українська медична стоматологічна академія”.

Наукові інтереси: комунікативно-прагматичні виміри англomовного дискурсу; теорія концептуальної метафори; текстотвірні потенції фразеологічних одиниць.