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## **Ethno-cultural specifics of Korean phraseology**

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Any nation's specific view of the world, determined by its unique culture, customs and religion, can be also expressed through phraseology. As the largest part of information about the surrounding world comes to us through the linguistic channel, humans live in the world of concepts, created by people rather than in the world of real things and objects. Therefore a human as a cognitive being is always under the influence of his surroundings, which are often perceived through phraseological units. So we can conclude that characteristic ethno-cultural aspects of a certain community are expressed and stored in its language as its idioms and phraseological units.

**Key words:** *phraseology, ethno-cultural, lingua-cultural problems of phraseology.*

### **Introduction**

Languages' phraseological vocabulary has already been an object of deep research for more than half a century. Linguistics scientists distinguish three main reasons for rapid increase of interest in phraseology, which are as follows: 1) phraseologisms are used very widely and actively by native speakers of all languages in both oral and written speech, and evidence of such usage can be found in ancient manuscripts, contemporary literature as well as in recordings of actual speech; 2) phraseologisms are a unique phenomenon reflecting the way the native speakers of a given language categorize it; 3) they are also a powerful means of linguistic impact.

As sociolinguists point out, language, having formed as a historical necessity, is supposed to conform to the requirements set by society. At the same time, language reflects the society's present state and can actively contribute to its progress.

Let us first see some Korean phraseologisms inseparably related to the country's culture and history. *함흥 차사* (*chasa* means a government official sent on an important errand, Hamheung is a Korean town on the east coast) stands for somebody who was sent on an errand and never came back. *삼초차례* (lit. "to visit a house three times") means "picking the right man takes a lot of patience and attention" and refers to three visits of Yu Bi, an emperor of the Chinese Qin dynasty, to the house of a noted scholar Jaegalyang, intending to invite him to cooperation. Understanding the meaning of the two above-mentioned expressions is directly related to knowing the relevant historical facts. On the other hand, here are expressions requiring a knowledge of Korean culture in order to understand them, such as: *포석을 놓다* (lit. "to set *posok*"). *Posok* means a strategic setting of stones for Korean checkers, *baduk*, and the expression means "to take preventive measures." Also we can mention *파김치가 되다*, which literally means "to become an onion *kimchi*" and should be understood as "to become very tired," and many other similar expressions.

Phraseologisms as repositories of ethno-cultural content keep attracting the attention of linguists from many countries. “Phraseologisms, or phraseological units..., reflect specific national traits and identity. Phraseology is an imprint of the nation’s rich historical experience; it reflects people’s language concepts related to labor activities, the way of life, culture and intellect. Studying phraseology is an indispensable part of learning language and improving speech culture. Phraseological units, when used correctly and properly, enrich speech with unique originality, special expressive ability, accuracy and vividness.”<sup>1</sup>

The 21st century linguistics has been actively developing the trend that considers language a cultural code of the nation where it is spoken, a way to penetrate not only that nation’s contemporary mentality, but also ancient peoples’ ideas of the world, society and themselves. Most information about the world comes to us via the linguistic channel, thus making people live in the world of concepts created by themselves rather than in the world of things and objects.

In recent works, linguists more and more frequently describe concepts such as “language view of the world,” “ethno-cultural specifics of language,” and the number of new research directions increases, such as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, ethno-linguistics, ethno-psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics, lingua-culturology, linguistic regional geography, etc. This means that language is now being viewed in its interaction with people and their culture, where the concept of culture is not “the historically determined level of social development, its creative abilities and people’s abilities,” but “the system combining traditions, customs, norms, values and behavior rules, same for all representatives of a certain nation or state.”

In other words, language is the most important way of the formation and existence of people’s knowledge about the world. An aggregate of such knowledge, imprinted in language forms and expressions, constitutes what is known as a “language view of the world.” It is generally known that the language view of the world differs among nations. Thus it enables us to speak about the ethno-cultural specifics of any given language.

The ethno-cultural specifics of a language should be understood as “an aggregate of distinctive features and means of one nation’s language as compared to other languages; determined by the unique way of life of a certain national society. It is language that has always been “the main keeper of nations’ language fund, peoples’ means of expressing their culture and identity.”

In most phraseological units the main idea is presented through figurative imagery. The objects constituting phraseological units represent certain things, events and qualities. For example, in the expression 꽃이 고와야 나비 날아든다 — “a flower must be beautiful to attract a butterfly,” we encounter symbols very popular in Korean folklore and medieval poetry: 꽃 (a flower) symbolizes a young woman, and 나비 (a butterfly), a young man.

However, there are also many expressions devoid of any imagery and understood literally (they are considered to be aphorisms), for example, 밥은 열 곳에 가서 먹어도 잠은 한 곳에 자라 — “it is all right to eat rice in ten different places, but you must sleep in one place only.” In this phrase 밥 (boiled rice) and 잠 (sleep) are not used figuratively and must be understood directly.

At present the problems of language’s phraseology and its national and cultural originality are research objects for many linguists. And, since phraseology has proved to be a “repo-

<sup>1</sup> Умарходжаев М.И. Основы фразеологии. Ташкент: ФАН, 1983. С. 5.

sitory of the most abundant information about the representatives of a yet unknown culture, about national and cultural peculiarities,<sup>2</sup> we can state quite certainly that national and cultural specific traits are most vividly expressed through images borrowed from a nation's environment: e.g., Korean nature, way of life and customs. Household goods, pets and animals, birds, plants, etc. — all of them can be found in phraseologisms and constitute a unique gallery of images inherent in Korean culture.

For example, we can find quite a number of national clothes' names in phraseological units: *치마*, *고무신*, *삿갓*, *저고리*, etc. *치마*, which is a Korean wide skirt, is used in *치마바람* "skirt wind" — meaning woman's brisk social activities; *고무신* (Korean rubber shoes) are used in *고무신을 거꾸로 신다* — "to wear *komusin* backwards," meaning "this woman dumps men." *삿갓*, a large reed or bamboo hat, used to cover oneself against rain and sun, is used in *삿갓을 씌우다*, "to put a *sakgat* on someone" — to cause harm to anyone, to receive ill-gotten gains, to rip somebody off. For Koreans, *삿갓* symbolizes the sense of shame about a misdeed, a crime or leaving the scene of the crime. The word refers to the tradition of wearing a large reed hat in order to cover one's face to prevent other people from seeing it, and the person wearing this hat cannot look up into the sky because he/she feels guilt before God.

Any nation's specific view of the world, determined by its unique culture, customs and religion, can be also expressed through zoomorphic metaphors and comparisons, which help people convey the speaker's feelings and emotions, which cannot be properly communicated by using neutral language means. The examples of such expressions can be: *닭고집이야* — "(he) is so stubborn" (lit. "as stubborn as a hen," also can be compared to English "pig-headed"), or *아, 여우야!* — "she's such a fox!"

However, it should be kept in mind that the meaning of many words can not only reflect objective reality, but also express the speaker's attitude to it, which is also defined as emotional nuances: respect, admiration, tenderness, or, vice versa, contempt and disgust. These emotional nuances are not present in every word, they can be constant or depend on the situation, their intensity in a word meaning can vary, but in a definition of a concept any expression of an attitude is absolutely absent.

Emotional nuances can be related to some pleasant or unpleasant associations, for example, there are tender expressions, such as *강아지* — "a puppy," *꽃돼지* — "a piglet," *토끼 같은 자식* — "kids like little rabbits"; rude expressions, such as: *개 같은 놈* — "he's no better than a dog," *개 새끼* — "a son of a bitch"; expressions of contempt, such as *우물 안 개구리* — "a frog in a well (narrow-minded)," *곰 같다* — "(he) is like a bear (a clumsy person)," *청개구리* — "a green frog (a greenhorn)," and so on.

Phraseological units can describe a person in different aspects: they can depict his appearance, his intellect, his deeds and behavior, stress his personality traits. For example, a pig is associated with a *dirty, untidy person*; or it can mean a person who *eats too much, a glutton*, thereby adding a strong emotion to a statement.

*돼지는 흐린 물을 좋아한다* — "a pig likes dirty water," or *밥값도 못 한다* — (he) cannot even earn his rice — "he's nobody"; *대추씨 같* — ((he) is like a jujube seed) — "a robust fellow (short but sturdy)," etc.

<sup>2</sup> Телия В.Н. Русская фразеология. Семантический, прагматический и линво-культурологический аспекты. М.: Школа «Языки русской культуры», 1996. С. 12.

It should also be mentioned that a phrase can carry a meaning, which is, for example, generally negative, but the emotional content of it can vary from ironic and contemptuous to very rude. Therefore it is very important to choose the correct translation, considering these emotional nuances. For instance, the Korean association with a tiger is “a very severe and ferocious, scary (spoken about behavior or face expression) person — 몹시 사납고 무서운 사람.

호랑이 같다 — “like a tiger”

서슬이 시퍼렇다 — “1) ferocious or threatening, 2) furious (literally “with a bright blue edge”)

In many phraseological units we can encounter the image of a wild goose (웨이러기), which symbolizes loneliness in both language and poetry. It can as well carry the meaning of coming autumn. The examples of such expressions are 짝 잃은 기러기 — “like a wild goose that lost its spouse,” 무리를 잃은 웨기러기 — “like a wild goose that fell behind its flock” (about being alone and feeling lonely); 기러기가 가는 곳에 제비 모양 못 찾는다 — “Where geese go, swallows can’t be seen,” 낙동강의 오리알 — “a Nakdong-gang river duck egg” — about being abandoned, left alone.

If we turn to natural and weather phenomena, we can frequently encounter *thunder* (천둥), *lightning* (번개), *snow* (눈), *frost* (서리), *wind* (바람) in Korean phraseology. The *water* (물) is also a common symbol in expressions, for example 바람 먹고 구름 똥을 싣다 — “(he) is a dreamer”; 물 뿌린듯 조용하다 — “a dead silence.”

To symbolize darkness and gloom, Korean phraseologisms use *night* (밤), *the shadow side* (음지), and to convey the meaning of *light* or *radiant life*, *the sunny side* (양지) is employed. *Running water* (흐르는 물), as well as a *rolling stone* (구르는 돌) are the imagery describing active, laborious people. To give an example of it, 흐르는 물은 썩지 않는다 — “running water never rots.”

Phraseological units also reveal a general picture of common people’s deepest poverty and need: 집도 절도 없다 — “(he) has neither a house nor chopsticks,” 열 냄이 죽 한 사발 — “one bowl of rice gruel for ten people.”

In Korean phraseology there are many instructive expressions, which are a record of the nation’s ethical views of family basis, marriage, love, upbringing of children, etc. They generally teach the young generation to treat elders, especially their parents, with respect, to love their family, to be faithful friends.

For example, 귀한 애기 매 주고 미운 애기 엇 준다 — “you teach the child you love with a rod, and the child you don’t like with a candy,” 의붓 아버지 떡 치는 데는 가도 친아버지 도끼질 하는 데는 안간다 — “(he) doesn’t go to the place where his father chops wood, but he goes to the place where the stepfather makes rice-cakes,” 올창일 적 생각 못하고 개구리 된 생각만 한다 — “he doesn’t remember that he was a tadpole, he only remembers how he became a frog”; 짝이 기울이면 오래 못 산다 — “if a couple is not equal, it won’t last long”; 황금 만영 붙여 교자 일경 — “rather than give ten thousand golden coins to your son, teach him a Confucian canon”; 부부는 오륜의 하나이여 만복의 근원이 — “marriage is one of the five Confucian bases, a source of many pleasures”; 학자 되기 전에 인간이 되라 — “before you become a scholar, you must become a human.”

A very curious phraseological unit 남의 친환에 단지 — meaning literally “to cut one’s finger to help someone else’s parents’ illness” refers to an ancient belief that it takes blood from son’s or daughter’s little finger (given as a drink to the parents) to cure parents’ illness.

Therefore this expression can be applied to people taking excessive care of somebody else, or to a person intruding into someone else's business.

### Conclusion

In view of the discussion above we can safely assume that, for any language, its native speakers' background knowledge and practical experience as well as the cultural and historical traditions of their community are in a close relationship with the meanings of phraseological units of that language. In turn, when we distinguish common traits in the phraseological vocabulary of two or more languages, it facilitates our understanding of these languages' lingua-cultural particularities.

Possessing its unique way of comprehending the world, every nation also has its own way of its reflection in the language and creates through language a unique reality image understandable to the members of this community. Therefore it appears that, in order to correctly interpret the semantics of phraseological units, it is very important to research the nation's lifestyle thoroughly, as the information about traditions, customs, crafts, historical events becomes the culturological base of idioms and phraseological units.

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