

## HUMANITIES

## METHODS OF BIBLICAL PHRASE STUDIES

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**Abstract.** The article deals with new methods of biblical phrase studies. The following methods have been under consideration: attributive, phraseological identification, phraseological application, dictionary definitions, componental and contextological analyses. A conclusion is made that using different methods is necessary as it promotes a comprehensive and profound elucidation and re-interpretation of every biblical phrase.

**Keywords:** biblical phrase, method, expression, re-interpretation, stability, reproduction, topological approach.

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**Introduction**

A biblical phraseological unit is reproduced in speech as a compound language sign that first came into being in the Bible, having an independent meaning and consisting of two or more words, among which at least one has a re-interpreted meaning, that indicates a certain notion of some subject, phenomenon or quality. Biblical phrases emerged in the texts as well as plot bases and are of great interest for the researchers of many languages (*Ivanov, etc., 2019*).

In A. Koonin's publications (*1970; 1986; 1996*) phraseological bibleisms are treated from the point of view of their origin, ways of forming, peculiarities of usage in modern English texts. The scholar pointed out, that the extensive group of borrowed phraseological units of biblical origin occupy special position owing to the specificity of their source. He raised another important problem of studying biblical phrases – the correlation of these units with their prototypes and considered basic divergencies among them as well as their types.

As a rule, these divergencies are caused by their re-interpretation of literal meaning of a phrase prototype, the change of emotional bibleism colouring and formal modifications of a figurative biblical expression. It often happens when a variant of a biblical prototype becomes a phrase. The above-mentioned and other A. Koonin's publications are of a scholarly interest

as they represent basic problems of studying phraseological bibleisms together with basic directions of this layer research.

Some problems of studying English biblical phrases have also been dealt with in L. Myahkova's articles (*Myahkova, 1987; 1988*). In her first article the author treated biblical units from the standpoint of general semantic phenomena, characterizing these phrases both fixed in a dictionary and in the process of their text function. Among other things L. Myahkova points out an important peculiarity of the units under study – all of them generalize life experience of man, express vital wisdom, a profound philosophical sense, that is their meaning is closely connected with a human being.

In the second article the researcher sets a task to consider nominative peculiarities of phraseological bibleisms serving for the designation of man. All these units are characterized by an anthropological sign of selective orientation. The signs, underlying nominations in phraseological units under study, are treated from the point of view of prototype continuity.

Solodukho's research is basically concentrated on the treatment of the so-called "phraseological internationalisms" constituting an extensive enough group of phraseology, available in any language. Phraseological internationalisms comprise phrases underlain by artistic images, taken from Greek and Roman mythology, history, literature as well as phrases of biblical origin. The problem of studying internationalization of language phrase-stock ranks high in his investigation (*Solodukho, 1989*).

The most interesting thing in his research is that the author singles out two basic groups, based on the character of their relations going back to the Bible and classical literature. The first group includes formations, the primary shapes of which are established in texts, that are created on the linguistic basis. Their sources turn out to be corresponding prototypes (metaphoric or non-metaphoric word-groups), e.g. *daily bread*.

The second group represents phrases, formed on the basis of text contents but having no direct correspondences (prototypes) in it. The sources of phrases of this group are text fragments, having image motivations, e.g. *Judas kiss*.

A similar thought is available in O. Dmitriyeva's article, dealing with the research of an extensive layer of nominative units, adopted by phraseological corpus at the beginning of the New English Period and constituting its "nuclear part" (*Dmitriyeva, 1990*). The author refers to such units as phrases, having the Bible as its source. The analysis, carried out by her, demonstrate that some of the units, are formed on the basis of biblical plot, e.g., *see a mote in one's brother's eye*, others are connected with it only by motivation, but not its concrete material form. Thus, one can come to a conclusion, that the majority of publications concerning the problem of phraseological bibleisms, have been written according to the channel of the general theory of loan-words and focusing on phrase formation.

There are a number of works, that for the most part deal with the problems of semantic peculiarities of phraseological units of biblical origin as well as other significant issues of biblical phrase studies.

O. Akhmanova and L. Polubichenko brought forward the problem of "philological topology" concentrated on studying the notion of philological invariant, which is historically and sociolinguistically conditioned. In the opinion of the authors, at different epochs and in various social groups of speakers sense distinctive factors quite often turn out to be diverse sides of seemingly similar phenomena (*Akhmanova, Polubichenko, 1979*).

The topological approach to the bibleism studies presupposes the comparison of different contexts used, in which they are represented both in the form of original citations from the Bible, and phrases having lost their primary sense. The causes are studied according

to which a certain thought, expressed by anyone proved so essential for a given language community, that a great number of its members repeatedly appealed to it by means of reiterating.

The correlation of gnomic citations and idioms proper must also be taken into account. The expressions of gnomic character represent the phenomenon as timeless, as the absolute truth and have an aphoristic mnemonically convenient form. Such expressions are usually clear even without drawing a certain sense structure.

The analysis of functioning traditional and occasional phraseological bibleisms testifies to the variety and systematicity of using expressive properties inherent in them as language and speech facts. Thus, one more problem of studying phraseological units of biblical origin is their treatment as general language expressive properties of these units (figurativeness, expressiveness, emotionality, assessment) as well as the peculiarities of their speech usage for achieving greater text impression.

### Methods

The most significant methods of studying biblical phraseological units are the following.

**Attributive methods**, including such procedures as: a) solid corpus of phraseological units with the usage label of "bible" from phraseological dictionaries, reference book, the dictionaries of proverbs and quotations; b) atethesis – "diverting" from the original (the Bible) of those phraseological bibleisms which had been assigned to it by mistake; c) giving a more precise definition of form of a given phraseological unit, caused by the availability of heterogeneous from the point of view of modern phraseology material in English dictionaries; d) singling out variants of phraseological bibleisms from dictionary articles.

By means of singling out solid corpora from dictionaries these phraseological units are usually selected which have such usage labels as "bible" or "etymologically biblical". However, usage labels, indicating the attribution of phraseological units are not always precise, therefore the procedure of atethesis is applied. For revealing the most precise date of fixating a certain phrase a re-verification is carried out, while using A New Oxford Dictionary on Historical Principles.

In a number of cases dictionaries ungroundedly include the expressions, having been created by some author on the basis of a biblical text or plot but not being phraseological bibleisms in reality. E.g., a phrase *to out-Herod Herod – to be very cruel, to exceed everyone in cruelty*. This expression was created by Shakespeare. It contains allusion on a well-known plot of King Herod who ordered to kill all the babies in Judaea. Though there is no this expression in the biblical texts, it has the Scripture as its source. In this and similar expressions the biblical situation turns out to be re-interpreted, and biblical images serve the basis for creating new phraseological units of a non-biblical disposition.

Phraseological stability is treated in the broad sense of the word as a complex property covering all the aspects of phrasal structure. It is the notion of phrasal stability that is the basis of V. Koonin's phraseological theory, who demonstrated that stability is a complex phenomenon, including five micro-levels summarizing a common index of phrasal stability: stability of use, stability on the structural and semantic level, being expressed in a structural and semantic model of phrase formation; stability of fully or partially re-interpreted meaning; stability of lexical stock admitting substitution of phrase components only within phrase variability; morphological stability manifested in the availability of components with a zero

and incomplete paradigm and syntactical stability, connected with a set word order in a phrase, the changes of which are possible only within variability, structural synonymy and occasional transformations. Thus, phraseological stability is the scope of invariance, inherent in different aspects of phraseological units, conditioning their reproduction in a ready-made form (Koonin, 1986: 43).

In narrow comprehension phrase stability is manifested in their reproduction of a ready-made form.

**Reproduction** is a regular recurrence of language units of different degree of complexity, that is heterogeneous formations of versatile quality. Phrase reproduction in speech is the form of revealing their stability in language, as stability and conditioned re-interpretation by it cover all the aspects of phrase structure. According to Koonin's figurative definition phrases are stable not because they are reproduced as ready-made, but vice versa, they are reproduced as ready-made because they are stable formations (Koonin, 1986: 84). The categories of stability and reproduction correlate functionally as potentiality and realization. Stability, that is keeping in one's memory a steady unity of form and contents presupposes its reproduction.

**Separate taking shape** is inherent in phrases of different structural types. It is established by means of contextual analysis of grammatical changes in phrase components. A criteria of variant taking shape is singled out enabling the sphere of action extension of the existing criteria. Separate taking shape of phrases may be established in the context by means of occasional indices (such as putting in and different structural changes).

**Unreserved disposition of phrase structure** is manifested in the fact that as one indivisible whole with all its stock it usually combines with notional words (word) in speech being a phrase encirclement.

One more important principle of phraseological identification proposed by A. Koonin, is the principle of studying phrases in synchronical and diachronical aspects. An all-round study of the state of language phraseological stock is impossible without combination of these approaches. Any study of phrase meaning compels us to appeal to the sources of these units within certain limits. It is the complication of phrase meaning that causes the clash of diachronic and synchronic aspects.

The diachronic aspect of research presupposes the study of origin and evolution of phrases in a language and in this sense it is directed at revealing original processes of phrase creation. The essence of diachronic research is: from a separate to the general, on the level of individual units to common regularities, typology of phrase creation. The task of the diachronic analysis is revealing the prototype of a phrase – the basis, the type of the material that gave birth to the beginnings of phrases under consideration as well as the definition of the processes that led to the phrase emergence. The use of diachronic analysis enables uncovering inner-system links and forces, influencing the character of phrase creation.

**The synchronic plane** of research is carried out on the basis of some totality of phraseological units, firmly established in a language as a result of centuries-old practice of a language community, and being the elements of lexico-phraseological language system. Among these units there is a certain structural, semantic or figurative correlation (Stebelkova, 1979). Here one must take into account not only inner regularities of the system, but also its outside relations with reality.

**The criterion of full and partial re-interpretation of phrase meaning.** The re-interpretation of meaning may be treated as a dominating property of semantic phrase structure. A direct meaning always precedes the emergence of idiomatic sense in a phrase.

Re-interpretation emerges as an occasional semantic transformation of the prototype of the future phrase, as it is still in its potential stage and is not a language unit. When a potential phrase, acquiring elements of stability, lacking for it, becomes virtual (that is, a language unit), semantic transformation loses its occasional character and turns into re-interpretation, representing itself as a usual phenomenon. Thus sense formation of phrases proceeds in the process of re-interpretating previous word meaning, when there is full and partial sense transformation of phrase prototype (or a phraseosemantic variant), based on the semantic shift.

**Method of phraseological application** or method of superimposition of a phraseological unit on an equivalent variable word-group, if it is available. This method enables defining the nature of the integrated meaning of the phrase under study and the degree of semantic fusion of its components.

The superimposition of a phrase on the variable word-group of the same name reveals the structure of the sense of the syntactic pattern that the phraseological meaning is based on. Categorical lexico-grammatical word meanings and syntactic correlations among them may help in finding out which parts of phraseological meanings correlate with the corresponding word components. Then, by means of confrontation, the correlation of elements of phraseological meanings may be established, associated with certain word components, with the system of meanings of corresponding words of free usage. The interaction of phrase components with the words of free usage, expressed in their substitution with words, the meanings of which are drawn together with lexical meanings of these components in some way is possible only because they are intuitively perceived as words with a certain sense structure.

As a rule, systemic lexical component meanings of phrases as a whole cannot be applied to a concrete situation. This is explained by frequent substitution of components with words, having a common semantic sign with them and capable of designating the elements of the given situation directly.

At superimposing a phrase on a variable word-group both a positive and negative effects are possible. Positive in case of the availability of variable word-group and negative effects are possible. Positive in case of the availability of variable word-group and negative in case of its absence.

Method of application succeeds to ascertain that the components of applied (superimposed) phrase components are not comparable with words of free usage in semantic, derivational, morphological and syntactic relation, the same way as a phrase is not equivalent to a word. This method comes in touch with a componental analysis and with the method of dictionary definitions as at co-measuring of phrase-component with a word one will have to rest upon a word-stock of unfolded definition of the corresponding phrase.

**Method of dictionary definitions** proceeds from the assumption that dictionary definitions are a reliable source of information about the meaning both of an individual word and a phraseological unit. At analyzing semantic structure of phraseological bibleisms, it is recommended to take into account lexicographical data, using dictionary definitions from explanatory and phraseological dictionaries as informants. Out of three aspects of plane content of a phrase, denotative and significative ones are singled out according to dictionary definitions, while the connotative item of meaning is either not given in a dictionary or in a few cases is rendered with the following usage labels: jocularly, bookish, lofty, stable, ironical, etc., e.g.,

*tell it not in Gath* – used jocularly in the sense “do not make it public” (*LDELIC*, 1992).

A definition is neutral both in relation to a speaker and to a hearer, e.g., *a fly in the ointment* – a little flaw that reduces or destroys the value or usefulness of the whole (Ichikawa, 1969).

The confrontation of the figurative phrase and its non-figurative definition demonstrates that the definition of a phrase does not comprise language figures, it does not cause emotional and expressive perception, while the usage of a figurative phrase is aimed at the expression of a corresponding emotional reaction.

The usage of not only one but also several dictionaries will enable avoiding well-known drawbacks in the explanation of meanings by lexicographic sources.

**Method of componental analysis** is the analysis by means of semes (differential signs, components). The usage of this method is realized on the basis of definitional analysis for showing the most general and typical regularities of forming phraseological meaning. The merit of componental (seme) analysis is in the fact, that it gives the possibility of singling out the whole scope of meanings of a language unit, the reflection by the semantic structure of a phrase, the movement from concrete to abstract as well as trace the systematicity in revealing signs, forming the meaning.

The structure of phrase meaning consists of three types of semes: archsemes (general semes of gender meaning), differential (basic) semes of aspectual meaning and potential (additional) semes, reflecting side characteristics of the designated object. The following basic types of semes are singled out:

1. With respect to the language system **generally accepted** and **occasional semes** are singled out. The first ones are members of phrase meaning and occasional are realized only in context, supported by the meaning of a phraseological unit. In other words, occasional semes predetermine occasional information of the whole phrase, realized in the act of communication.

2. According to distinctive force **integral** and **differential** semes are singled out. Integral semes render the information, which is general for the group of phraseological units or phraseosemantic variants and differential semes which perform distinctive functions within the same groups. In a phrase *to build one's house upon the sand and build one's house upon a rock* the integral seme is “the creation of something”, and differential semes are “the lack of a strong basis” and “the availability of a strong basis”.

3. From the point of view of singling out a constant sign and a non-obligatory sign **nuclear** and **peripheral semes** are singled out. Nuclear semes comprise, e.g., the seme “intention” in a phrase *the massacre (or slaughter) of the innocents*. Peripheral ones comprise hardly probable semes that are members of the denotative aspect of meaning, e.g. “*knowledge about something*” in the phrase like *the blind leading to blind*.

4. According to the character of singling out in the meaning **explicit** and **implicit semes** are distinguished. Explicit semes refer to the information that is immediately represented in meaning. They may be literal and figurative. Thus, in a phrase *a quiverful of children* a figurative explicit seme “a great number” may be singled out, and in *rule with a rod of iron* – “cruelty, despotism”. Implicit semes are those components of meaning, that are available in the plane of contents but lack in the plane of expression. They render the scope of implicit information in the structure of meaning.

5. According to the contents **positive** and **negative** semes are singled out. Positive semes reflect the sign, available in the denotatum and negative – lacking in it, e.g., in a phrase *the apple of smb's eye* – “anything or person one cherishes” (Ichikawa, 1969) a positive seme “something dear” may be singled out and in a phrase *a thorn in the flesh* from the

definition "a source of annoyance, irritation, affliction, grief, etc. a persistent one (*Ichikawa, 1969*) a negative seme may be traced.

6. **Prototypical** (very typical) semes may be singled out only in phrases with a living inward form, e.g. *all flesh in grass* prototypical semes non-motivated phrases could come into being. Singling out prototypical semes is connected with associations emerging between the meaning of a phrase and the meaning of a prototype.

7. The semantic structure of a phrase may also have **grammatical semes**, e.g. in *David and Jonathan* – "inseparable friends" the semes denoting pair objects are available, and in a phrase *thirty pieces of silver* – "the value of treachery" the seme, denoting the plurality of objects is available.

Method of componental analysis is especially effective in considering the process of re-interpretation of changeable word-groups and may also be applied in the analysis of synonyms with the aim of singling out common semes in their meanings.

**Method of contextological analysis** proceeds from the assumption that phrases obtain semantic clarity only in context, when it becomes the expression of a speaker's position in a concrete situation of speech communication. The task of this method is studying the relation and connection of meaning of a set phrase with an indicating minimum that is a word or word-group, rendering a necessary semantic information. The application of this method enables studying the relations among words with independent and bound meanings within the framework of phraseological configuration.

Phraseological bibleisms are language units with a vividly expressed pragmatic orientation. They become an effective means for achieving pragmatic aims by the author of the expression. Here an important role is played by the context, giving grounds for a more complete revelation of phrase meaning. Therefore one of the issues of biblical phrase studies in texts is the problem of representing peculiarities of contextual use of these units, their usual and occasional application.

## Conclusion

On the basis of the above-mentioned we draw the following conclusion. Biblical phrases are stable, reproduced in speech word combination or a sentence with a full or partial re-interpreted meaning, having emerged on the foundation of a biblical prototype or plot. The Bible may be considered as a universal source of phrase creation because it unites a great number of sources in itself, such as oral folk-lore, traditional dicta and aphorisms, fiction. The specificity of the biblical source in the plane of phrase creation is in the fact, that it is a canonical source, text in the invariable form, that is, the Bible is an integral text.

As phrase creation is a department of learning natural processes of emerging and development of phraseological units in a language, one may speak about unification of diachronic and synchronic aspects of studies. The task of diachronic phrase creation analysis is the revelation of the basis – the type of the material on which phraseological units under consideration come into being, the definition of the processes that gave birth to the biblical phrases.

The analysis of functioning usual and occasional biblical phrases testifies to the variety and simultaneously systematicity of expressive properties inherent in biblical phrases as language and speech facts. Thus, one more problem of biblical phrase studies is consideration of both common language expressive properties of these units (figurativeness, expressiveness,

emotionality, evaluation) and the peculiarities of their speech use for achieving greater text expressiveness.

Such language phenomena as evaluation, metaphorization and others may be represented from the cognitive point of view. A cognitive approach is important not only because of the fact that it broadly and comprehensively covers language phenomena. It also promotes the penetration in the essence of these phenomena and gives the possibility of "opening them from inside" taking account of a human factor in language as it is man who is the basis of the biblical world model.

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