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## INDIAN-AMERICAN CULTURAL AND PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITY IN IMMIGRANT FICTION

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Дубовий К. Індійсько-американські культурні та фразеологічні одиниці у емігрантській художній літературі; 11 стор., бібліографічних джерел – 13; мова – англійська.

**Анотація.** Осягнення культурного самоусвідомлення через мовні засоби відображення концептів культури є актуальним та перспективним для лінгвокультурологічного аналізу фразеологізмів. У процесі міжкультурної комунікації ФО з національно-культурним компонентом виступають джерелом фонові інформації, яка утруднює процеси інтеркомунікації, оскільки притаманна цим одиницям імпліцитна фонові інформація є недоступною для представників іншої культури. Водночас розширення сфери міжнародної комунікації сприяє інтерналізації ФО, а отже, зближенню культур. У творах Б. Мухерджі відбувається поєднання індійської культурної спадщини, британського та американського варіантів англійської мови. Проаналізовані ФО свідчать про те, що авторка широко використовує лінгвокультурну скарбницю США у творах, присвячених, в основному, життю американських емігрантів.

**Ключові слова:** фразеологізм, американізм, національно-культурне забарвлення, міжкультурна комунікація, емігрантська література США.

One of the basic functions of language – the preservation of cultural heritage of a society – is carried out by phraseological units (PhUs) which register human experience in a very compact way. PhUs serve as a mirror of culture, national psychology and philosophy, retaining information about the mentality usually in the encoded form; they include details about material and spiritual life of the ethnic group and characterize the world outlook in general. A recent direction of research in phraseological studies, “linguo-cultural investigation”, “focuses attention onto the reflection of spiritual state in the language of a man in the society” [3, p. 160]. This kind of investigation is aimed at clarifying the figurative meaning of everyday language and the implications and extension of the world-view. If the same world-view is shared by all members of a linguistic-cultural community the generation and comprehension of metaphorical meaning is possible. The phenomenon of using PhUs by American immigrant writers arouses acute interest among linguists as the works of such authors stand on the crossroads of different cultures, languages and mentalities. For this reason we have chosen PhUs used in American English as the object of research. We will focus on the culturally specific component of semantics of PhUs and metaphors used in the fiction of B. Mukherjee, a modern American author of Asian origin, with the aim of analyzing peculiarities of actualization of cultural meanings in the immigrant prose.

The topicality of the research is determined by growing attention to the problems of cultural identity and expression in a globalized world, correlation between language and spiritual culture. One of urgent linguistic issues is studying national connotations of PhUs and peculiarities of reflecting national mentality in them.

National and cultural components of PhUs have been studied by such scientists as B. Azhniuk, A. Zhukov, V. Maslov, O. Selivanova, V. Teliya et al. Thesis related to this topic have been recently defend-

ed by such Ukrainian linguists as O. Nahorna, O. Nazarenko, S. Oliynyk. The works of these and other scholars make the theoretical basis of the present research.

The article is the first attempt to analyze PhUs used in B. Mukherjee's works as her fiction has so far been studied only in literary studies [12] and not in linguistics. So, the findings will help to further understand the problem of cultural unity in fiction of immigrant writers.

Bharati Mukherjee is one of the best-known voices of the South Asian diaspora, whose novels and short stories are found on Asian-American literature course syllabi across the country. Her perfect knowledge of English (which she spoke in India since early childhood) makes her a native speaker of English and lets her use PhUs profoundly in her prose. It is a sign of native command of the language. But the English of India (where the British variant is used) and the English of her new country of residence – America, have differences including differences in using PhUs. The author has adopted some inherently American idioms in her writing.

American literature is rich in idioms reflecting the way of life on the American frontier. The role of the frontier is tremendous not only in the history but also in contemporary life of Americans. R. A. Billington sees the impact of frontier in some characteristics of the American people, “during three centuries of expansion their attitudes toward democracy and nationalism and individualism were altered, and they developed identifiable traits not shared in like degree by their European ancestors: wastefulness, inventiveness, mobility, and a dozen more” [1, p. V]. Other authors describe the image of the frontier. For example, L. Schlissel reflects how different the image of frontier may be, “it could mean deep forests or grasslands stretching for a thousand miles; it could mean red dirt flats or outcroppings of rock surging up against the sky” [10, p. 81].

The recurrence of the image in American English facilitated its conventionalisation and phraseological development. So, in A. V. Kunin's dictionary of phraseological units we find the fixed phrase "new frontier" [13, p. 300]. It means "the principles and policies of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party under the leadership of President John F. Kennedy" and as a political catchphrase was first used by Henry Wallace in a book of the same title (1934). By this slogan President John F. Kennedy maintained that, like the Americans of the frontier in the nineteenth century, Americans of the twentieth century had to rise to new challenges, such as achieving equality of opportunity for all.

There are numerous examples of PhUs reflecting the way of life on the frontier. The idiom "rope (someone) in" reflects the experience of catching and collecting cattle with the help of lassoes by the frontiersmen in the West. That is the direct meaning and the idiomatic meaning is "to include (someone); to persuade (someone) to join in doing something." The prototype of the idiom "this neck of the woods" originally denoted a remote community in the woods, later the idiomatic meaning "a particular place or part of the country" developed which can be seen from the example: "What do you do in the evening in this neck of the woods?" [11, p. 238].

The life in the woods is also reflected in the idiom "have a chip on one's shoulder", the etymological meaning of which was "a reference to a man who carries a piece of wood balanced on his shoulder in the hope that someone will give him an excuse for a fight by knocking it off". The idiomatic meaning is: "to have rather an aggressive manner, as if always expecting to be insulted, ill-treated etc": "He is very difficult to deal with – he's always had a chip on his shoulder about the lack of education" [11, p. 56].

Modern American authors still turn to the image of the frontier and immigrant writers do not make an exception. B. Mukherjee vastly uses the word "frontier" in her novel "Jasmine" which is often described as a modern voyage of an Indian immigrant to the American frontier. This lexical unit is used as a metaphor to mean "the limit, the edge". For instance, when the protagonist of the novel Jasmine is getting angry she thinks: "I don't want to hear the rest. I'm ... worried that the frontier of madness is closer than I guessed" [5, p. 218].

As Jasmine is moving west – starting her journey from New York she wants to head to California in the end of the novel, she realizes that her immigrant experience is close to that of first settlers in America, who went west moving the frontier further: "I haven't been west of Lincoln, Nebraska. Every night the frontier creeps a little closer" [5, p. 20]. That is why in the very end of her story Jasmine thinks that she is open to new adventures. Here "frontier" is a synonym to "adventure" and "risk" because she decides to look for the man she met before and fell in love with. She is the woman who is ready to look ahead, to fight for the best that future may hold in store for her. She has

no moral scruples and does not feel guilty of her decision: "It is not guilt that I feel, it's relief... Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through uncaulked windows" [5, p. 240].

B. Mukherjee's novel "Jasmine" relies on frontier myths and the narratives of Americanization associated with western places, mobility, the lifestyle of frontier-heroes. As an Indian woman writer living in the USA, she explores the promise of American individualism and liberation alongside the burden of Old World responsibilities and cultural ties that may show female oppression.

Jasmine from the eponymous novel stands out as a female role of self-reliance and feminine courage. "Mukherjee employs frontier myths to project the psychological and cultural development of the woman, who physically and metaphorically travels toward western philosophy" [2, p.53]. The protagonist moves from India to Florida, to New York, then to the Midwest, and finally to California. Metaphorically she moves from East to West and becomes an American "gold digger". The writer uses this idiom several times in the novel both in the idiomatic and metaphorical meanings. As a phraseological unit the phrase means "a woman who associates with or marries a man chiefly for material gain" [9]. Metaphorically it may stand for a person who seeks better life. The examples below actualize both implications.

"Karin, Bud's ex, once called me a gold digger. We were in front of the frozen foods section of the Hy-Vee" [5, p. 195].

"Bud is gold, I retorted, and if digging him out of the sadness he was in when I met him was what she meant, then, yes, I was a gold digger" [5, p. 196].

The Gold Rush mentality adopted by an Asian born girl makes her feel that she is able to profit from the uncharted country of America. Jasmine stays to live with Bud Ripplemeyer, a disabled banker, on a farm. "In doing so she creates a life that replicates that of earlier immigrants and their eventual assimilation" [2, p. 53]. The author shows metaphorically Jasmine's transformation and notes that she becomes a real American gold digger.

Mukherjee's rich cultural and educational background allows her to use PhUs with American cultural semantic component along with international idioms taken from the Bible:

"But Bud smashed his cigarette out in the tinfoil ashtray, lumbered over to the twirling man, and knocked his head back with a soft, clumsy punch. Gold digger and Lazarus" [5, p. 201].

We can observe a cultural mixture of idioms "gold digger" and "Lazarus" (originating from New Testament – the brother of Mary and Martha, whom Jesus restored to life (John 11-12). Jasmine calls herself "a gold digger" with the connotation of her Americanization and absorbing American culture, while her crippled husband is called "Lazarus" as his ancestors came from Europe and the idiom recollects his roots from that part of the world.

The story presents Jasmine as a new pioneer who will follow the same fate as the earlier settlers: she too will be absorbed into the culture and become a true American. This way of assimilation is full of obstacles, which the author portrays in the tradition of American literature through wilderness legends and frontier myths. That is why American PhUs originating in this period of history are relevant to the text of the story.

B. Mukherjee's westernization is evident in her use of sayings originating from the Bible in other novels, for example in "Leave It to Me":

*"Jesus, Mama DiMartino used to say, made a cornerstone of the very stone that builders had the dumbness to reject. Matthew 21:22: the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls"* [6, p. 143].

Bharati Mukherjee's mastery of the American idioms is so consummate that her style may be almost unintelligible to the readers of Indian or British English. At times sentences contain an expression or a reference that the average Indian would find hard to decipher:

"May be like Imre, freed from the dignities of old world cultures he too could get drunk and squirt Cheez Whiz on a quest" [7, p.34].

"Cheez Whiz" is a thick processed cheese sauce or spread sold by Kraft Foods. And the phrase "to squirt smth on a quest" means "to hunt for food".

Another example is: "I am in bed watching the Vanilla Gorilla stick it to the Abilene Christians on some really obscure cable channel, when she comes through the door wearing lavender sweats. It's a November Thursday, a chilly fifty three, but she's hibachiing butterfly lamb on the balcony" [7, p. 79].

The reader should know that "Vanilla Gorilla" is a football team with the strongest college football player in 2008, and "Abilene Christians" is a football team of Abilene Christian University, located in Abilene, Texas. Then it's clear that "to stick it to" means "to treat harshly or severely". "Hibachiing" is borrowed from Japanese meaning "cooking on a portable cooking apparatus similar to a small barbecue", and a strange-sounding phrase "butterfly lamb" is a piece of meat split almost in two and spread out flat".

Idioms connected with American football have come into regular use in B. Mukherjee's works: "I felt a proprietary interest since it all derived from squiggles on a paper that Sunday afternoon in Atherton that I'd help unleash — scrambling quarterback, short passes in the flat, widen the field, it's the width, not the length!" [4, p. 267].

In other instances the writer makes use of her Indian cultural and linguistic heritage. There are phrases and proverbs obviously translated from popular Indian sayings. For example, sayings about how fortunate it is to give birth to a son, and how unlucky

is the woman who has a daughter, and about unmarried women:

"There's money to be made of a son's pee; there's rope to hang a daughter with. A woman without a husband roams the streets like an untethered ox. She brings calamity wherever she stays" [8, p. 247].

The process of intercommunication can be problematic as sometimes the implicit information of units can be unknown to representatives of other cultures. At the same time widening the scope of international communication facilitates the process of internalization of PhUs and therefore brings closer different cultures. B. Mukherjee's prose is such an example of mingling cultures. People from different parts of the world meet on the pages of her books. She brings her Indian cultural heritage into her stories. But she is definitely an American author writing in American English. The selected PhUs show American cultural component in the language of her works of fiction.

Traditionally, communities have been based on markers such as ethnicity and religion – which proffer recognizable homogeneity. But in today's rapidly changing world hybrid identities such as the ethnically South Asian American citizens, including B. Mukherjee, are increasingly common. Works by Asian Americans appear to celebrate the kind of chaotic plurality that is the much-eulogised face of the modern world and at the same time changing America. The analysis has shown that the writer combines Indian heritage, the acquired English language in India and the language of her new country of residence – the USA.

B. Mukherjee relies on frontier myths and the narratives of Americanization associated with western places, mobility, the lifestyle of frontier heroes. As an Indian woman writer living in the USA, she explores the promise of American individualism and liberation alongside the burden of Old World responsibilities and cultural ties that may show female oppression. She brings in quotations from the Bible and Indian proverbs.

It is in this space of confrontation of differently oriented social accents and of diverse socio-linguistic perceptions that the novel of diasporic consciousness is born. It has its being in a co-existence of plurality of voices which do not fuse into a single psyche but exist on different layers generating dialogic dynamism. We may conclude that PhUs reflect ethnically specific peculiarities and enrich works of fiction with cultural background that can be both inherited and obtained after immigration to another country.

The present research is only the first step on the way of in-depth study of culturally specific language units in immigrant fiction. It is necessary to analyze how cultural hybridity is expressed on the level of the language and this is the task for further research.

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### **ИНДИЙСКО-АМЕРИКАНСКИЕ КУЛЬТУРНЫЕ**

### **И ФРАЗЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ЕДИНИЦЫ В ЭМИГРАНТСКОЙ ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ**

**Аннотация.** Постижение культурного самоосознания через языковые средства отображения концептов культуры является актуальным и перспективным, в данном случае – для лингвокультурологического анализа фразеологизмов. В процессе межкультурной коммуникации ФЕ с национально-культурным компонентом выступают источником фоновой информации, которая утрудняет процессы интеркоммуникации, поскольку присущая этим единицам имплицитная фоновая информация является недоступной для представителей другой культуры. В то же время, расширение сферы международной коммуникации способствует интернализации ФЕ, а следовательно, сближению культур. В произведениях Б. Мухерджи происходит сочетание индийского культурного наследия, британского и американского вариантов английского языка. Проанализированные ФЕ свидетельствуют о том, что автор широко использует лингвокультурный американский материал в произведениях, посвященных, в основном, жизни иммигрантов в США.

**Ключевые слова:** фразеологизм, американизм, национально-культурная окраска, межкультурная коммуникация, иммигрантская литература США.

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### **INDIAN-AMERICAN CULTURAL AND PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITY IN IMMIGRANT FICTION**

**Summary.** The task of understanding cultural self-awareness through language means of reflecting culture concepts is topical and challenging for the linguistic and cultural analysis of phraseological units. In the process of intercultural communication PhUs with a national-cultural component serve as a source of background information which complicates the processes of communication because the implicit information found in such lexical units is incomprehensible for the representatives of other cultures. At the same time the expansion of international communication is instrumental in internalizing nationally-specific foreign PhUs, and consequently it brings cultures together. In B. Mukherjee's works B. there we find unity of the Indian cultural legacy, British and American variants of English. The analysed PhUs show that the author widely uses the lingvo-cultural heritage of the USA in fiction devoted mainly to lives of immigrants in the USA.

**Keywords:** phraseological unit, Americanism, national-cultural colouring, intercultural communication, US immigrant literature.

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