

## IDENTIFYING THE KEY COMPONENTS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

Roza Ayupova<sup>1\*</sup>, Elena Arsenteva<sup>2</sup>, Gulnara Lutfullina<sup>3</sup>, Elena Nikulina<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Kazan Federal University, Russian Federation, <sup>3</sup>Kazan State Power Engineering University, Russian Federation,  
<sup>4</sup>Moscow Pedagogical State University, Russian Federation.

Email: \*rozaayupova@gmail.com

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### Abstract

**Purpose of the study:** The experiment is aimed at studying the potential of non-native speakers in applying various idiom transformations. The relevance of the current work is closely related to its purpose since the ability to identify the key component of an idiom or proverb makes their comprehension much easier and deeper.

**Methodology:** The authors used experimental methods to reveal the role of transformations in identifying the key components of idioms. The experiment included several types of experiments: natural, transformational, open and mental. The subjects were 28 third-year students of Kazan Federal University whose major is English as a group of informants. The group of informants was given 10 English phraseological units which include a component part nominating some profession. Students were given two tasks and the time limit given for it was 2 – 2.5 hours.

**Main Findings:** The paper describes an experiment conducted with the purpose of identifying key components/components of phraseological units. Having analyzed two types of phraseological transformations (substitution and deletion) performed by informants, we draw conclusions concerning the relevance of applying each of these types of transformation for the purpose of identifying the key component/components.

**Applications of this study:** Analysis of the results of the experiment conducted within this research demonstrates that each of the phraseological units under analysis is built according to a particular semantic model, which is retained when any of the component parts are substituted and can be restored when deleting component parts other than key ones.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** The fact that most phraseological units are built according to some semantic template and the possibility of distinguishing one or more key components within them is assumed. The experiment also reveals the possibility of an element of a phraseological unit being not necessarily a component part. The relevance of the current work is closely related to its purpose since the ability to identify the key component of an idiom or proverb makes their comprehension much easier and deeper.

**Keywords:** *Phraseological Unit, Idiom, Key Component, Semantic Model, Substitution, Deletion.*

### INTRODUCTION

Phraseology is currently a widely studied branch of linguistics. A new experimental method for investigating some properties of phraseological units was first utilized by American psycholinguists [R. Gibbs, N. Nayak, J. Bolton and M. Keppel \(1989\)](#) at the end of the 80s of the previous century. Their aim was to study the syntactic behavior of idioms in discourse from a psycholinguistic viewpoint. The experiments conducted by these scholars showed that the ability of idioms to undergo various types of syntactic transformations depends to a great extent on the transparency/non-transparency of their inner form. It was also shown that native speakers recognize idioms notwithstanding any transformations they may undergo because native speakers' perception of idiomatic meaning is conditioned by metaphors idioms are based on. Since the then-experimental method has been widely used in studying various aspects of phraseology, as it proved to be one of the reliable methods.

In this study, we also use experimental methods for the purposes of revealing the role of transformations in identifying the key components of idioms and studying the potential of non-native speakers in applying various idiom transformations.

The relevance of the current work is closely related to its purpose since the ability to identify the key component of an idiom or proverb makes their comprehension much easier and deeper.

The empirical material of this study consists of phraseological units with a component part nominating some professions mentioned in this paper were extracted from the online Urban Dictionary, though the entire research deals with much more phraseological units with aforementioned component parts taken from other phrase graphic sources of the English language.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Phraseological studies became even more multi-aspectual in the XXI century. Most contemporary studies are related to the identification of idiom's origins. [G. Lakoff and M. Johnson \(2003\)](#) identify a metaphoric aspect of their meaning while [J. Littlemore \(2015\)](#) pays more attention to metonymy. [A. Sabban \(2007\)](#) focuses on cross-cultural or general aspect of phraseology semantics. The research of Mexican scholar [M. Alvarez de la Granja \(2008\)](#) also takes into account the cross-linguistic perspective of fixed expressions. Nevertheless, identification of the key component attracts

more and more researchers, as it gives the clue to better understanding and translation of idioms from one language into another.

As a result of a thorough analysis of the process of identification of transformed idioms in different discourses [E. Arsenteva and E. Semushina \(2013\)](#) concluded that in case the informants are EFL students, the required level is not lower than High Intermediate.

The results of the experiment completed by [I. Byiyk \(2016\)](#) show that such complicated types of idiom transformation as cleft use, contamination, and extended metaphor can be performed only by native speakers, because of the necessity of the informant being able to perceive the direct and metaphoric meaning of the idiom simultaneously. Similar conclusions were drawn by [I. Guryanov \(2016\)](#) as a result of his experiment with English, Russian and German bookish idioms.

Most of the experimental studies related to the identification of idioms in discourse use computer technologies to do so. For example, the work by [I. Guryanov \(2016\)](#) applies the methodologies of computer linguistics for the identification of bookish idioms. In the work by [R. Ayupova, K. Sakhibullina and M.L. Ortiz Alvarez \(2018\)](#) also methods of computer technologies are used. They apply the Ngram model and its possibilities to detect variants of models of contextual use of phraseological and pharmacological units and to identify the key component/components in them. The research of Mexican scholars [B. Sanchez and D. Pinto \(2015\)](#) is devoted to the identification of Spanish verbal phraseological units in media texts utilizing four different supervised machine learning techniques.

Many experimental studies focus on teaching foreign idioms, e.g. [M. Vulchanova, V. Vulchanov and M. Stankova \(2011\)](#), [Z. Vasiljevic \(2015\)](#), [E. Varlamova, A. Naciscione and E. Tulusina \(2016\)](#).

### Hypotheses

This paper is based on our experiments investigating two hypotheses: 1) that substitution of a component/components and deletion of a component/components or ellipsis are the most relevant types of transformation used for identifying the key component /components; 2) that with high level of language proficiency and necessary knowledge about the mechanisms of idiom transformation even non-native speakers are capable of creating interesting examples of phraseological transformation (substitution and deletion) using phraseological units given beforehand.

### METHODOLOGY

As it was already mentioned above, the main method utilized when carrying out this research is the experimental method. The experiment was conducted in order to confirm or disprove the hypotheses we generated. The complex experiment we conducted included several types of experiments: natural, transformational, open and mental.

Respondents: The subjects were 28 third-year students of Kazan Federal University whose major is English as a group of informants. The reason of our selecting these students as our respondents lies in the following: firstly, they have already taken the course of English Phraseology which means that they have the idea about the mechanisms of making various idiom transformations; secondly, the level of English of these students is high enough to participate in our experiment, since taking TOEFL at the end of the previous term 86% of them showed the result corresponding to Higher Intermediate, 14% – Intermediate.

As it has already been stated above, while taking the course of English phraseology the students were taught mechanisms of various idiom transformations: samples of different transformations from various literary works were given for identifying the type of transformation, and a number of exercises on using different transformations were done during the seminar classes.

The group of informants was given 10 English phraseological units which include a component part nominating some profession: adversity is a good schoolmaster; <as> fat as an alderman; every man is the architect of his own fortune; every cook praises his own broth; head cook and bottle-washer; <as> drunk as a fiddler's bitch; the butcher, the baker, the candle-stick maker; no man is a hero to his valet; a nation of shopkeepers; what is a workman without his tools.

Students were given the following two tasks: 1) to make up a sentence or a context is using each phraseological unit with a substituted component/components; 2) to make up a sentence or a context using each phraseological unit with a deleted component/components. The time limit given for it was 2 – 2.5 hours.

The research requires scrutinizing the meaning of each idiom dealt with during the experiment. Consequently, semantic analysis is an inherent part of our work. We also see structural analysis as one of the necessary steps in achieving the aforementioned purpose.

Discussing the types of contextual use of the given phraseological units by students would not be possible without applying contextual analysis. The method of descriptive analysis facilitated the description of the process and outcomes of the experiment conducted.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As far as conducting an experiment makes up the main part of our research, its methodological basis focuses on

experimental studies, a significant part of which is devoted to works about componential parts of idioms and proverbs. In this regard, one should first mention the researchers conducted by American linguists [R. Gibbs, N. Nayak, J. Bolton and M. Keppel \(1989\)](#) who proved that any idiom could undergo various lexical alterations and be recognized in case of sufficient pragmatic context ([Gibbs & O'Brien, 1990](#)).

In the work by [R. Ayupova, M. Bashirova, O. Bezuglova, A. Kuznetsova and K. Sahkibullina \(2014\)](#) statuses of the ornithonym component in the structure of idioms and proverbs are analyzed based on the theory of Kunin (the reference date). According to Kunin, the statuses of phraseological unit components can be: 1) real words, components used in their direct meaning; 2) potential words, components with weakened lexical and syntactic meaning; 3) former words, components with transferred meaning; 4) ghost-words, components not existing as separate words in the language. The authors show that an ornithonym component as a part of different idioms and proverbs can be of various statuses ([Ayupova et al., 2014](#)). In another work by this author on the basis of the analysis of American proverbs and sayings used in "Poor Richard's Almanack" by Benjamin Franklin, it is proved that their "communicative form depends on morpho-syntactic properties" ([Ayupova et al., 2014](#)).

In the works by [J.-P. Soehn \(2006\)](#), [D. Dobrovol'skij \(1988\)](#), [D. Dobrovol'skij and E. Piirainen \(1994\)](#) the subject of research are the idiosyncratic peculiarities of idiom component parts and their meaning. The authors investigate an idiom's ability to undergo various grammatical alterations and study the level of boundedness of their meaning.

[C. Fernando \(1996\)](#) considers the role of key components and comes to the conclusion that such a component is usually preserved when an idiom undergoes some transformations and that it is due to the key component that a recipient identifies the transformed idiom in any discourse.

A dissertation by [A.R. Abdullina \(2007\)](#) describes a linguistic experiment dealing with the identification of key components of a number of English and Russian idioms. She confirms the hypothesis that substitution of a component or components and ellipsis are the most relevant types of idiom transformation for identifying the key component both for native and non-native speakers. She also showed that a key component bears the major part of the semantic meaning of an idiom; therefore speakers are able to recreate the complete image of most English and Russian idioms used in the experiment. Other component parts just add some complementary information to the idiom meaning.

The experiment conducted by [E. Arsenteva and Y. Arsentyeva \(2013\)](#) is directed at the identification of the key components of some widely used English proverbs. The results confirmed the role of key components/components in perceiving and restoring the image of the whole proverb. The experiment also showed the dependence of transformational potentials of idioms on the number of their component parts: the more component parts an idiom has, the higher its transformational potentials are.

Any experiment directed at identifying the key components of phraseological units presupposes that only substituents expressed by major category words can be admitted as key components because function words serve to build the semantic model providing appropriate linking between component parts.

625 responses in total were received from the informants.

1. Dealing with the first proverb adversity is a good schoolmaster ("misfortune hardens a person, makes him or her stronger") most students preferred to substitute either the first component "adversity" by its synonyms "failures", "misfortune", "misery", "difficulty", or the component "good" also by lexemes with the similar semantics "perfect", "incredible", "excellent", "best" etc., e.g.: 1. Failures are good schoolmaster. 2. My honey, you should remember that misfortune is a good schoolmaster. 3. We all know that misery is a great schoolmaster. 4. Hey, dear, take it easy because any difficulty is a good schoolmaster. 5. Adversity is a perfect schoolmaster. 6. Adversity is an incredible schoolmaster. 7. Adversity is an excellent schoolmaster. 8. Adversity is the best schoolmaster.

Many fewer substituted the last component "schoolmaster" and they chose the lexemes «teacher» and «experience», e.g.: 1. Adversity is a good teacher. 2. Adversity is a good experience.

One more variant of substitution – the substitution of the last two components "good schoolmaster" had the following variations: 1. When we face some problems we should always remember that adversity is a great teacher. 2. Adversity is the best teacher. 3. Adversity is one of our greatest teachers. 4. Adversity is a great experience.

As to the second type of transformation we expected from our informants – ellipsis – it was manifested mostly by two manipulations: deleting the components "adversity", or «good», e.g.: 1. Adversity is a schoolmaster. 2. Now you know that a good schoolmaster is...

So, the proverb under analysis is built according to the semantic model "something bad (happening in the life of a person) is a thing that teaches him or her how to behave in a proper way". The components of this phraseological unit can be substituted by their synonyms or lexemes of the same semantic group. The examples of deletion demonstrate that two of the components, represented by notional words ("adversity", "good"), can be omitted with the possibility of restoring the whole phraseological unit, while such a possibility is not observed in the case of omitting the third

similar component “schoolmaster”. Therefore we suggest that this component has a higher salience than the other two components because it makes up the semantic center of the utterance.

2. The second phraseological unit <as> fat as an alderman has the meaning “very fat, obese, stout”. The component “fat” bears the major part of the semantics, which is intensified by the given comparison “as an alderman”. Here one should consider the meaning of the lexeme “alderman”, “a member of a municipal assembly or council in many jurisdictions founded upon English law. The term may be titular, denoting a high-ranking member of a borough or county council, a council member chosen by the elected members themselves rather than by popular vote, or a council member elected by voters”. We presuppose, when this phraseological unit appeared in the English language people bearing such titles were well-off; therefore they did not feel a lack or deficiency of food as ordinary people did. Consequently, people of high rank seemed fatter in comparison with the representatives of the lower class of society.

The informants demonstrated full comprehension of the meaning of the phraseological unit and chose the component “alderman” for substitution by a lexeme denoting somebody or something very fat, animated or unanimated, such as “pig”, “swine”, “hippopotamus”, “cow”, “beached whale”, “barrel”, even a fairy tale personage “Carlson”, e.g.: 1. He is as fat as a pig. 2. Andrew is as fat as a hippopotamus. 3. You should avoid eating too much food otherwise you’ll become as fat as a barrel. Look at this girl! She is as fat as a cow. 4. Nobody wants to become as fat as a beached whale. 5. Don’t you think that his girl-friend is as fat as a swine? 6. Mark is as fat as Carlson.

As the examples of component substitution show, all informants substituted the second of the two components expressed by notional words, though the first one – “fat” could also be substituted by its synonyms (stout, thick). Nevertheless, one can distinguish “fat” as the key component, because it expresses the main semantic meaning of the phraseological unit.

In their examples of the second type of transformation nearly all the informants deleted <fat>, e.g.: 1. If you eat so much, you’ll look like an alderman. He was a nasty person with the figure of an alderman. 2. His wife says that he is gaining weight and will soon become an alderman.

But all the informants resorted to making a micro context which helps to restore the meaning of the component “fat” and in this way the image of the whole phraseological unit. Therefore, we have no doubt that “fat” is the key component of the given unit.

3. The third unit given to the informants is the proverb every man is the architect of his own fortune – “Your own decisions and your own actions determine what your life will be like”. Most of the substitutions made by our informants concerned the component “fortune”, which was substituted by its synonyms or lexemes denoting something good, leading to happiness as “fortune”, “happiness”, “luck”, “peace of luck”, “success” “good luck”, “wealth”, or lexemes denoting some philosophical notions as “fate”, “destiny”, “life journey”, e.g.: 1. Every man is the architect of his own happiness. 2. Every man is the architect of his own life journey. 3. Every man is the architect of his own fate. 4. Every man is the architect of his own luck.

The second frequent substitution was the substitution of the component “man” by lexemes denoting a human being such as “person”, or the ones with more exact meaning as “student”, “wife” e.g.: 1. Every person is the architect of his own wealth. 2. In our university life, every student is the architect of his or her own success. 3. In marriage, every wife is the architect of her own fortune.

Just in several examples, one could observe the substitution of the component “every” by its synonym “each”, and “architect” by “creator”, or of both these components, e.g.: 1. Whatever is going on in your life, remember that each man is an architect of his own destiny. 2. Every man is the creator of his own fortune.

Examples of deletion show that most convenient for it prove to be the component “man” and the ones expressed by functional words “his” and “own”, e.g.: 1. Every man is the architect of fortune. 2. Being the architect of his own fortune he left the country during the war. 3. Don’t be silly, be the architect of your own fortune. 4. Why do you give up without even trying? You should be the architect of your own fortune.

We do not observe the deletion of the two components expressed by the notional words “architect” and “fortune”. While trying to omit any of them we found out that it results in the impossibility of restoring the whole phraseological unit. So we conclude that this unit is built according to the semantic model “every man is a creator of what he will experience”, where two components “architect” and “fortune” bear the main semantic meaning.

4. The fourth phraseological unit every cook praises his own broth (“every man praises something he has created or owns; every man praises the bridge he goes over”). Here the most easily substitutable component was “broth”, instead of which nominations of various other dishes prepared by a cook were used, e. g.: 1. Every cook praises his own dishes. 2. Every cook praises his own soup.

The second variation of substitution – touching upon two more components “cook” and “broth” – does not change anything in the semantic model of the proverb, e. g.: 1. Every frog praises its own swamp. 2. Every pedlar praises his



own needles. 3. Every grocer praises his own goods. 4. Every bird praises its own nest. 5. In the sphere of show business, every singer praises his own performance.

One could also observe the substitution of three components, e.g.: Each priest praises his own religion.

Here are the most typical examples of deletion: 1. A cook praises his own broth. 2. Do you think it's good to praise your own broth? 3. Presenting his new program the Prime Minister was praising his own broth.

Though our informants did not substitute the component "praise", no doubt, its synonyms as "compliment", "talk up", "laud" can be used instead of it. In the examples of deletion, one can observe the only deletion of the components "every" and "cook", though one can also omit the component "broth" using ellipsis instead, and still it will be possible to restore the whole phraseological unit. So, we can conclude that the given phraseological unit is built according to the semantic model "everybody praises his/her own smth." However one can distinguish two key components "praises" and "own" within this proverb.

5. The next phraseological unit our informants had to deal with was head cook and bottle-washer - "someone who is in charge of trivial things as well as the important things". As the first possibility of substitution, the students saw the first part of the compound component "bottle-washer", which was substituted by lexemes denoting anything that can be washed, as "glass", "floor", "dish", "plate", e. g.: 1. My brother is a head cook and glass-washer. 2. Nick can do everything. He is ahead cook and floor-washer. 3. I'd like to speak with the head cook and dish-washer. 4. Don't you think that he is ahead cook and plate washer?

The next substitution concerned the whole component "bottle-washer", which can be substituted only by components semantically related to "cook" e.g.: 1. He looks like a head cook and little boss. 2. I don't think it's bad to be ahead cook and waiter.

The examples submitted by our informants prove the fact of components "head cook", "and" being the key components.

Among examples submitted as deletion, we accepted only one variant, which was used by quite a lot of informants, e.g.: 1. Soon John became a head cook and washer. 2. Is it bad to become a head cook and washer and to be able to do everything?

After analyzing these examples we can confirm once again that "head cook", "and" are the key components. As far as the component "dish-washer" is concerned, examples of substitution make it clear that fully omitting this component makes it impossible to restore the whole image of the phraseological unit. Therefore we can assume that here we also deal with the phraseological unit built according to the definite semantic model, which is "nomination of the top position and the lowest position in some business".

6. A comparative phraseological unit <as> drunk as a fiddler's bitch, in Urban Dictionary is defined in the following way: "A Victorian English description. Fiddlers were usually paid with food and drink at social events, as were their wives or mistresses. Since the women didn't have to work by playing music, they tended to drink heavily. By the end of the event, they'd be far drunker than anybody who had to pay or the fiddler himself" ([Urban Dictionary](#)).

Applying the first type of the suggested transformation with this unit the informants mostly substitute the last component "bitch" or the last two ones "a fiddler's bitch", e.g.: 1. Tom returned home as drunk as a pig. 2. If you return home again as drunk as a shoemaker, I'll leave you. 3. It's really disgusting to be drunk as a timber. 4. Don't you know him? He is always as drunk as a fiddler's horse. 5. Don't you see that he is as drunk as a skunk?

The examples of deletion also demonstrated the components "as drunk as" remaining untouched; one of the "drunk" is expressed by the notional word. This fact proves that this component can undoubtedly be claimed to be the key component of the idiom made up according to the semantic model "as drunk as smb/smth". Moreover, this component bears the major semantic meaning of the phraseological unit. Examples: 1. Look! He is drunk as a fiddler. 2. Again you are drunk as a bitch!

7. Dealing with the phraseological unit the butcher, the baker, the candle-stick maker ("people of different professions; different people") we can mention the fact that substitution touched upon nearly every component of it, e.g.: 1. They were the butcher, the baker, the image-maker. 2. They were the butcher, the baker, the cappuccino maker. 3. For our ceremony, we needed the florist, the baker, the candle-stick maker. 4. The cook, the baker, the candle-stick maker were present at the meeting. 5. A lot of people were present at the party, you could find the grocer, the baker, the candle-stick maker. 6. Don't you think that you are going to invite the butcher, the painter, the candle-stick maker to your birthday? 7. They were the photographer, the opera singer, the candle-stick maker.

The only component not to undergo any substitution was the second part of the compound "candle-stick maker". But we haven't found any evidence of this component having a different status than others. We can give two explanations for it. Firstly, this phraseological unit is built according to the semantic model where rhythm plays an important role; so the last component is very specific here. Secondly, two means of deriving words, nominating representatives of

different professions, are used in this unit: the suffix “-er” and the part of the compound “maker”. For this reason, retaining them makes it easy to recognize the phraseological unit.

In the examples of deletion, one can observe the omission of any of the components. In case the last component is deleted, informants use an ellipsis, which seems absolutely relevant, e.g.: A lot of people were there: the butcher, the baker... The audience was promiscuous; you could find even the butcher, the baker... You can find there a lot of different people: the butcher and candle-stick maker. Look around! The butcher, the baker...

The fact that deletion could omit the whole compound evidence for the possibility of the phraseological unit being recognized and restored by the combination of any of the two components. The fact that makes it possible is the phonetic characteristics of the idiom – consonance – the two components have the same initial consonant ‘b’, which should be referred to like one more peculiarity of the unit making it recognizable.

8. The next phraseological unit our informants had to work with was no man is a hero to his valet (“no man is a prophet in his own country”). Most of the examples of substitution concerned the last component which was substituted by a lexeme denoting a position inferior to the one expressed by the component “man”, or that may be used instead of it, e.g.: 1. No man is a hero to his servant. 2. No man is a hero to his housekeeper. 3. No man is a hero to his footman. 4. No man is a hero to his vassal.

The number of examples where the component “hero” is substituted is much less, e.g.: 1. No man is an idol to his valet. 2. No man is Buddha to his valet.

The substitution of several components simultaneously is observed only in one case, e.g.: No woman is a heroine to her maid.

For some reason, the informants did not submit any examples of deletion, though we suppose, the omission of the first or the last component can result in the form, which is easily recognized and restored, e.g.: 1. Trying to be a hero to your valet? 2. You know, no man is a hero to....

So we assume that this phraseological unit is built according to the semantic model “nobody is perfect to his/her inferior”, where the component “hero” conveys the main meaning and deleting it makes it impossible to restore the whole image of the phraseological unit.

9. Only one type of transformation proved to be possible with the next phraseological unit a nation of shopkeepers (“Englishmen”, “commonly attributed to Napoleon, is a reference to England or the United Kingdom”) – the substitution of the last component, e.g.: 1. Do you speak about the nation of shopmen? 2. Last Monday we had a meeting with the nation of five o’clock ceremony. 3. Are you speaking now about the nation of five o’clock tea?

The informants demonstrated the potentials of the transformed variant of the unit to be used to denote some other nations as Portuguese, French, Swiss, Australian, Pakistanis, accordingly, e.g.: 1. They consider themselves to be the nation of great sailors! 2. My new friend belongs to the nation of frog eaters. 3. I am very fond of traveling and next time I am going to visit the nation of cheese eaters. 4. Today we are going to speak about the nation of sheep breeders. 5. Why do you think the Pakistanis are called the nation of beauty and great grief?

Here we single out «the nation of» as the key components because deleting them makes it impossible to restore the phraseological unit.

10. Dealing with the proverb What is a workman without his tools (“If someone performs a job or task poorly or unsuccessfully, he or she will usually lay the blame on the quality of his or her equipment, or other such external factors, rather than take responsibility for his or her own failure”) the informants suggested various kinds of substitution: substitution of the component “workman” or “tool” by their synonyms or lexemes of the same thematic group; substitution of both these components, e.g.: 1. What is a workman without his instruments? 2. What is a craftsman without his tools? 3. What is an artist without his brushes? 4. What is a seamstress without her needle? 5. What is a doctor without his stethoscope? 6. What is a ballet-dancer without her points? 7. What is a fisherman without his rod?

Deletion was represented by the following two examples: 1. What is a workman without tools? 2. Don’t you think that he is a workman without tools?

In a conclusion one can state that this proverb is made up according to the semantic model “What is a representative of any profession without his main instruments?” the main semantic meaning laying on the components “workman”, “tools”.

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Analysis of the results of the experiment conducted within this research demonstrates that each of the phraseological units under analysis is built according to a particular semantic model, which is retained when any of the component parts are substituted and can be restored when deleting component parts other than key ones.

In the majority of the phraseological units, the key component/components were/were distinguished by applying transformations. We found deletion more efficient for this purpose since it shows clearly by omission which of the component parts results in the impossibility of restoring the whole phraseological unit. Substitution being important in identifying a key component cannot provide sufficient data for it.

Our experiment confirms that component parts of phraseological units have different statuses, some retaining more, others less of their semantic meaning. The key component is expressed by a major category word which, if deleted, causes the phraseological unit to lose its ability to be recognized. Some phraseological units may have more than one key component.

However, one can come across phraseological units within which no key components can be distinguished. Comprehension of such phraseological units is based on other key elements. Sometimes it was a phonetic peculiarity of an idiom expressed by the rhythm, consonance (repetition of the same consonant sound at the beginning of two component parts), and using the word-building elements; the suffix “-er” and part of the compound “-maker”. We are planning to conduct a similar experiment with a greatly increased number of cases and a greater variety of structural types of phraseological units.

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