

IDIOMS OF BIBLICAL ORIGIN IN CANADIAN NEWSPAPERS

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If natural language had been designed by a logician, idioms would not exist. A pure idiom must have constituent elements from which the overall meaning of the whole is not deducible [4, p.30.].

They are a feature of discourse that frustrates any simple logical account of how the meanings of utterances depend on the meanings of their parts and on the syntactic relation among those parts. Idioms are transparent to native speakers, but a source of perplexity to those who are acquiring a second language. The logical approach to language relegates idioms to the sidelines. Speakers use idiomatic expressions, on this account, as though they were words or phrases that have become frozen into a single

form with a special meaning. Somewhere in the mind these expressions are stored as exceptions, much as they might be listed at the end of a dictionary. Listeners first try to make a literal interpretation of an utterance. Another problem arrives when idioms are used in newspaper style. Every figure used in belletristic or colloquial style adopts various features in newspaper style. The evidence in *The Bank of English* suggests that idioms are very common in journalism and magazines, where writers are seeking to make their articles and stories more vivid, interesting, and appealing to their readers. Idioms are often used by both journalists and politicians as shorthand ways of expressing opinions or conveying ready-made evaluations [3, p.58-59.]. Newspaper style demands creative ways of writing and pompous expressions. Basically, when the author of the article uses an idiom it is more likely to be an intentional action rather than subconscious. Each idiom bears semantic as well as stylistic load. An idiom as a linguistic device might be effectively used for not only evoking the intended feelings in the reader, but also guiding them towards the decision the author supposes them to make.

Moreover, the journalist has not only to convey the necessary information, but also to impress the reader by presenting the information in a particular light; very subtle impressions. One of the features of Canadian press is that it is various in styles and stylistic devices, depending on the audience and the effect desired. Usually the style should be tolerant enough not to evoke irritation or hostility. Though we should not forget that in foretime the conquering religion was Christianity, so it left an indelible mark on the mentality, as well as language.

Based on our study, we can talk about some types of idiomatic meaning in particular article.

a. Fully tantamount. Idioms that belong to this group are fully correspond their initial connotative meaning

'...as if the women would ever demand eye for and eye when it comes to fighting for their rights...' ("Legalization or Decriminalization?" Jannie Iverson, Calgary Herald). The definition that is given for *an eye for an eye* refers to 'punishment equal to the crime' [1, p.471.], which corresponds to the original text of Scripture.

You have heard that it has been said,

An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth /Matthew 5:38 /

'...as Gabriel was sent to Mary, same Harper is there to get word of better life to Canada...' ("Frontwards" David Smith, Calgary Herald). It is allusion to the archangel who announced the birth of Jesus [1, p.555.]. Particularly, this idiom has positive connotation with an element of conviction, however also demonstrating an element of obtrusion. It refers to a biblical allusion as a source of positive influence. Moreover, it brings the concept of general benefit, and in some sense ascends to the idea of redemption by Messiah.

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth / Luke 1:26 /

b. Partially demythologized. Idioms from this group have fractionally lost their initial meaning or have changed within the time. An example was used in *The Guardian Weekly*, in "They forgot how to lie plausibly" by Marek Spenser:

'...glorifying the American dream, striving for new heights, we forget that our country was once the promised land for our ancestors, desired, fought for and admired.' The interpretation in this case entirely matches the original meaning.

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." /Hebrews 11:9/

However it should be mentioned that in this particular context, the connotation is marginally varying, in terms of meaning. The author brings the idea of a 'promised land' as a blessing and welfare people had, but not the one they were supposed to have.

Another example is *'...police arrived at eleventh hour, while ambulance and fire brigade were already there. They say better late than never...'* ("Struggling for better" Steve Morrison, Times Colonist, Victoria BC)

The whole article is emotionally colored and bears striking influence. The author is categorical in judgments and relatively convincing. *Eleventh hour* usually has meaning 'just in time, at the last moment' [1, p.147.]. The allusion is to biblical parable of labors hired for the vineyard.

And about the eleventh hour he went out,

and found others standing idle /Matthew 20:1-16/

c. Deliberately misused. This group represents idioms with changed meaning, their connotation is different from the original one.

'The salt of the earth could never even imagine being reason of all the problems. The more you think of yourself, the worse problems you cause.' ("Wheal or Curse?" Tory Helm, Canadian Immigrant, BC edition)

This allusion refers to *salt of the earth*: the perfect, the elected, the worthiest and the most honest of human race [1, p.1217.]. For instance, it is used in this text when talking about 'chosen' people or those who consider themselves to be of this degree. Stronger emphasis is provided by the emotionally-colored expression *could never even imagine*. The allusion refers to the next verse:

*You are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost his savor,
Wherewith shall it be salted? / Mathew 5:13/*

'...confused and disgruntled people flounced around. Knowing nothing, they were unable to separate sheep from goats and no one could ever blame them...' ("Last moment rescue" Henry Chu, The News/Abbotsford)

Separate sheep from goat means to 'divide the worthy and unworthy, the good from evil' [1, p.1245.], whereas in original scripts it refers to genuine disciples and those who pretended to be. In particular context, the author refers more to the way people feel, rather than the way they behave. In other words, referring more to the emotional sphere than the rational sphere.

And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divided his sheep from the goats / Matthew 25:32 /

Generally, the usage of biblical idioms is not widespread in Canadian press due to their specific connotation and general religious tolerance. If used, they are most likely to appear in adult press, while youth-oriented newspapers and magazines omit complicated choices of language. Moreover, biblical idioms are more likely to be used in articles devoted to political and social spheres, predominantly referring to urgent problems and issues of society. Besides, such articles are oriented towards educated readers; those who may be familiar with particular excerpts from Scripts or having a general comprehension of the allusions. On the other hand, the reader should prove to be easily persuasive. So we can say that their usage is reader-oriented with an accent on those who are easily convinced.

As a part, their modification of the language appears to be partial demythologization. However misinterpretation occurs from time to time. Biblical idioms are more likely to lose their initial connotation or change under the influence of either extralingual context or intentional change.

To conclude, it should be mentioned that the usage of idioms in general is not only a stylistics device; it also refers to sociolinguistics and cultural aspects. This study might be useful for those who are interested in phraseology and idioms, as well as to students majoring in languages and linguistics.

Literature references

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