

## **РОЗДІЛ II. ПРОБЛЕМИ ЛІНГВІСТИКИ ТЕКСТУ, ДИСКУРСОЛОГІЇ, КОГНІТИВНОЇ ЛІНГВІСТИКИ**

**Iryna Harbera**

ORCID: 0000-0001-5365-054X

UDC 811.161.2'27:316.48

DOI: 10.31558/1815-3070.2022.43.6

### **CONFLICTOGENIC POTENTIAL OF ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGY**

*У статті здійснено спробу визначити конфліктогенний потенціал англійської фразеології. Для цього описано ключові семантичні ознаки поняття «конфлікт»; зроблено вибірку відповідних англійських фразеологічних одиниць разом із контекстами вживання, які найбільш чітко й яскраво описують ту чи ту особливість конфліктної взаємодії; зроблено висновок про те, наскільки значний конфліктогенний потенціал англійської фразеології.*

**Ключові слова:** англійська фразеологія, конфліктогенний потенціал, лінгвоконфліктологія, фразеологічна одиниця.

**Statement of a scientific problem and its relevance.** In phraseological units, as a unique, peculiar figurative and evaluative verbal fund, information is stored about the sociocultural experience of the nation, in particular its attitude to conflicts, rules of conduct in them, ways to resolve them. Therefore, the problem of studying the role of phraseological units in the creation, deployment and completion of a conflict situation is relevant for modern linguistics. The relevance of the publication is due to the need to determine the magnitude of the conflict potential of English phraseology as the main way of figurative description of the surrounding reality.

**The object of the research** is the conflict communication. **The subject of the analysis** is English conflictogenic phraseological units.

**The purpose of the article** is to determine the conflictogenic potential of English phraseology. To do this, it is necessary to complete **the following tasks**: 1) to describe the key semantic features of the concept of «conflict»; 2) on their basis, make a selection of the corresponding English phraseological units (plus the contexts of their use), which most clearly and vividly describe one or another feature of the conflict interaction; 3) to draw a conclusion about how great the conflictogenic potential of English phraseology is.

**The material of the study** is about 756 English conflictogenic phraseological units (selected by continuous examination from (Siefring 2004; The Free Dictionary's Idioms dictionary)) and 988 contexts of their use.

**Methodological base:** among modern researchers of the methods of thematic and semantic classification of different phraseological units, it should be noted such linguists as C. Cacciari and P. Tabossi (Cacciari & Tabossi 1993), S. Glucksberg (Glucksberg), Z. Kövecses (Kövecses), P. Kvetko (Kvetko), P. McPherron and P. T. Randolph (McPherron & Randolph 2014), J. Seidl and W. McMordie (Seidl & McMordie 1988), M. Strakšiene (Strakšiene), etc.

**The scientific novelty of the work** consists in the first attempt to present a fragment of English phraseology, which is most actively used to describe conflict interaction in its general – lexicographic – understanding.

**The practical significance of the results of the study** lies in the possibility of their use during the teaching of disciplines in modern English phraseology, linguistic conflictology, communicative linguistics, as well as in phraseographic practice for compiling an ideographic dictionary.

**Presentation of the main material.** The (Cambridge Dictionary) describes «conflict» as 1) an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles, needs; 2) fighting between two or more groups of people or countries; 3) the forces that oppose each other to create the plot in a story, book, or film; 4) a serious disagreement between people, organizations, or countries with opposing opinions; 5) a situation in which there are opposing demands or ideas and a choice has to be made between them.

The authors of the (Collins English Dictionary) define «conflict» as 1) conflict is serious disagreement and argument about something important. If two people or groups are in conflict, they have had a serious disagreement or argument and have not yet reached agreement; 2) conflict is a state of mind in which you find it impossible to make a decision; 3) conflict is fighting between countries or groups of people; 4) a conflict is a serious difference between two or more beliefs, ideas, or interests. If two beliefs, ideas, or interests are in conflict, they are very different.

The (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English) defines «conflict» as 1) a state of disagreement or argument between people, groups, countries etc.; 2) fighting or a war; 3) a situation in which you have to choose between two or more opposite needs, influences etc.; 4) a situation in which you have two opposite feelings about something; 5) something that you have to do at the same time that someone wants you to do something else.

The (Macmillan Dictionary) defines «conflict» as 1) angry disagreement between people or groups, fighting between countries or groups; 2) a situation in which it is difficult for two things to exist together or be true at the same time, a feeling of being nervous or unhappy because you want two different things at the same time.

Thus, the main explanatory dictionaries of the English language define the following as the key qualifying features of the conflict: argument, disagreement, fighting.

On the basis of the semantic features that define the conflict identified above, we made a selection of English phraseological units that most clearly and vividly describe the conflict interaction:

- *agree to differ* ‘cease to argue about something because neither party will compromise or be persuaded; of two parties, to mutually accept that they simply do not (and will not) share the same view on a particular issue, in the interest of moving past the issue or avoiding further confrontation’ (contexts 1–3):

<sup>(1)</sup> After their discussion about politics intensified, Fred and Sue had to **agree to differ** before it impacted their friendship.

<sup>(2)</sup> I’m sick of arguing with you, so let’s just **agree to differ** and move on from this issue.

<sup>(3)</sup> Let’s just **agree to differ** on this topic and start talking about something else, huh?

- *apple of discord* ‘a subject of dissension; something that causes unhappiness or trouble’ (contexts 4–6):

<sup>(4)</sup> A: «*The apple of discord seems to be that you stole Ted's trashcan*». B: «*But I didn't, though! Look, my name is on this trashcan!*»

<sup>(5)</sup> *That stupid prom dress has been their apple of discord – they've been fighting over who gets to wear it for days now!*

<sup>(6)</sup> *Why aren't you talking to Mary Beth? What is the apple of discord here?*

- *battle of the giants* ‘a contest between two pre-eminent parties; a conflict or competition between two or more powerful people, groups, or entities’ (context 7):

<sup>(7)</sup> *Those are the two best teams in the league this year, so the championship game will really be a battle of the giants.*

- *a bone of contention* ‘a subject or issue over which there is continuing disagreement; an unresolved problem, dispute, or disagreement; the subject or point of an argument; an unsettled point of disagreement’ (contexts 8–12):

<sup>(8)</sup> *Curfew became a real bone of contention once the kids started pushing to stay out later than their father and I are comfortable with.*

<sup>(9)</sup> *I heard you guys aren't talking. What exactly is the bone of contention here?*

<sup>(10)</sup> *Jerry leaving his dirty dishes in the sink for days became a bone of contention between him and his roommate.*

<sup>(11)</sup> *We've fought for so long that we've forgotten what the bone of contention is.*

- *The question of a fence between the houses has become quite a bone of contention.*

- *have a bone to pick with someone* ‘to have reason to disagree or be annoyed with someone; to have an issue to discuss, argue about, or bring up (with one), typically something that is a source of annoyance for the speaker’ (contexts 13–14):

<sup>(13)</sup> *Hey, I have a bone to pick with you! Why didn't you put gas in my car after you borrowed it?*

<sup>(14)</sup> *Uh oh, the boss looks like she's got a bone to pick. I wonder who screwed up this time.*

- *fight like cat and dog* ‘(of two people) to be continually arguing with one another; to constantly fight or argue; if two people fight like cat and dog, they frequently have violent arguments or fights with each other’ (contexts 15–18):

<sup>(15)</sup> *Those two fight like cat and dog, so please don't put them together on the project.*

<sup>(16)</sup> *My brother and I were very close in age and we used to fight like cat and dog.*

<sup>(17)</sup> *They had fought like cat and dog ever since he could remember, and he wondered how they'd managed to stay together.*

<sup>(18)</sup> *They fight like cat and dog, but they are really very fond of each other.*

- *chop logic* ‘to argue in a tiresomely pedantic way; quibble’ (context 19):

<sup>(19)</sup> *I can't stand the way he chops logic! You can't have a conversation without him turning it into some tiresome fight!*

- *at cross purposes* ‘misunderstanding or having different aims from one another; in conflict with or in opposition to; with opposing viewpoints; with goals that interfere with each other’ (contexts 20–22):

<sup>(20)</sup> *You will never find success if you continue to work at cross purposes with your teammates.*

(21) *Bill and Tom are working at cross-purposes. They'll never get the job done right.*

(22) *We are arguing at cross-purposes. We aren't even discussing the same thing.*

- *cross swords* ‘to have an argument or dispute; to fight or argue; to become the adversary of someone; to fight, either verbally or physically; to quarrel’ (contexts 23–26):

(23) *Danielle and I crossed swords over our different approaches to the experiment.*

(24) *Gloria loved an argument and was looking forward to crossing swords with Sally.*

(25) *At every policy meeting the two vice-presidents crossed swords.*

(26) *At the committee meeting, I crossed swords with Professor Smith over her department's overspending.*

- *take up the cudgels* ‘to prepare for or engage in a conflict against someone or something (may or may not refer to literally arming oneself); start to support someone or something strongly; to defend, show strong support for, or argue on behalf of someone or something’ (contexts 27–30):

(27) *People from across the country are taking up the cudgels against the dictatorship.*

(28) *We have to be willing to take up the cudgels if we ever want to loosen the grip of these greedy corporations.*

(29) *People from across the country are taking up cudgels on behalf of the young man being held by police.*

(30) *He's got plenty of money to hire a proper legal team. I don't think he needs the likes of us taking up the cudgel.*

- *cut and thrust* 1) ‘a spirited and rapid interchange of views; a lively debate or argument; an enthusiastic exchange of ideas’ (contexts 31–32); 2) ‘a situation or sphere of activity regarded as carried out under adversarial conditions; a fencing technique that uses both the point and edge of the blade’ (context 33):

(31) *I don't mind a cut and thrust with Amy – she always has a unique perspective, even if we clash sometimes.*

(32) *The cut and thrust of a debate sure gives me an adrenaline rush!*

(33) *Look at that cut and thrust! She's doing such a great job in this match!*

- *at daggers drawn* ‘in a state of bitter enmity; prepared to verbally or physically fight another person or group’ (contexts 34–35):

(34) *The police have had to intervene because those rival gangs have been at daggers drawn lately.*

(35) *The members of the committee are at daggers drawn because they cannot agree on a course of action.*

- *play devil's advocate* ‘take a side in an argument that is the opposite of what you really want or think; to argue against or attack an idea, argument, or proposition – even if one is in favor of it – for the sake of debate or to further examine its strength, validity, or details’ (contexts 36–37):

(36) *I'm all for universal health care, but I'll play devil's advocate in asking how the government intends to fund such a massive undertaking.*

<sup>(37)</sup> Tom is always **playing devil's advocate** in any given conversation because he loves picking apart other people's arguments.

- *divide and rule (conquer)* ‘the policy of maintaining supremacy over your opponents by encouraging dissent between them, thereby preventing them from uniting against you; to gain or maintain power by fomenting discord among people so that they do not unite in opposition’ (context 38):

<sup>(38)</sup> The ascendancy of the faction occurred because they were able to **divide and rule** – they fooled the other parties into fighting while they rose to power.

- *add fuel to the fire (flames)* ‘(of a person or circumstance) cause a situation or conflict to become more intense, especially by provocative comments; to do or say something to make an argument, problem, or bad situation worse; to further incense an already angry person or group of people’ (contexts 39–41):

<sup>(39)</sup> The debate was going poorly for the senatorial candidate, and his strikingly uncouth comments simply **added fuel to the fire**.

<sup>(40)</sup> Revelations of the CEO's massive retirement package **added fuel to the fire** for consumers already furious over the company's dubious financial dealings.

<sup>(41)</sup> Anything the mayor says will just **add fuel to the fire**, so do not let him speak to reporters about this sensitive issue.

- *lock horns* ‘engage in conflict; to fight or clash; to get into an argument with someone’ (contexts 42–43):

<sup>(42)</sup> There's always tension between those two – they **lock horns** over everything.

<sup>(43)</sup> Let's settle this peacefully. I don't want to **lock horns** with the boss. The boss doesn't want to **lock horns** either.

- *at loggerheads* ‘in violent dispute or disagreement; in conflict with someone; having reached an impasse (about something)’ (contexts 44–47):

<sup>(44)</sup> They are **at loggerheads** over the best way to lead the committee.

<sup>(45)</sup> Tom is **at loggerheads** with Bill.

<sup>(46)</sup> We are **at loggerheads** with each other.

<sup>(47)</sup> The twins were **at loggerheads** over who should take the larger room.

- *go to the mat* ‘vigorously engage in an argument or dispute, typically on behalf of a particular person or cause; to give someone or something one's full support; to fight for someone or something until the very end’ (contexts 48–49):

<sup>(48)</sup> We firmly believe that she is in the right on this matter, and we're ready to **go to the mat** for her in court if necessary.

<sup>(49)</sup> Many members of the party have said that they'll **go to the mat** for this bill.

- *passage of (at) arms* ‘a fight or dispute; a skirmish, conflict’ (contexts 50–51):

<sup>(50)</sup> There is no better man to have beside you with a sword in a **passage of arms**.

<sup>(51)</sup> It came to light that the elderly patron of the theater engaged in a **passage of arms** with the director about the issue, even going so far as threatening to withdraw her support.

- *pour oil on troubled waters* ‘try to settle a disagreement or dispute with words intended to placate or pacify those involved; to calm or settle a tense situation’ (context 52):

<sup>(52)</sup> If those two are arguing again, send Mom in to talk to them – she's great at **pouring oil on troubled waters**.

- *part brass rags with* ‘quarrel and break off a friendship with; to end or sever a partnership, friendship, or association with one due to an argument or disagreement’ (contexts 53–54):

(53) *I had recently parted brass rags with my erstwhile friend and business partner over a dispute about money.*

(54) *I would advise you to consider your position very carefully before you part the brass rags with such a wealthy associate.*

- *hold the ring* ‘monitor a dispute or conflict without becoming involved in it; to monitor or control a conflict or dispute, especially in a neutral or uninvolved manner’ (context 55):

(55) *Working in HR, my job is to hold the ring between employees who have a problem, rather than involve myself directly in it.*

- *a running battle* ‘a confrontation that has gone on for a long time; a prolonged argument or disagreement’ (context 56):

(56) *When those two are in a running battle, it's hard to get them to finally reconcile.*

- *shoot it out* ‘engage in a decisive confrontation, typically a gun battle; to engage in a bloody and decisive gunfight; to disable or destroy something by firing at it with a gun; to enter into a gunfight with someone or some group of people’ (contexts 57–62):

(57) *The feud came to a head when the two gangs began shooting it out in the middle of town, leaving only a few people alive to tell the tale.*

(58) *Police were forced to shoot it out with the fugitive, who had holed up in an abandoned house with an assortment of firearms.*

(59) *We'll have to shoot the searchlights out around the building before we can attempt to break in.*

(60) *The gangster shot out the lock and barged his way into the office.*

(61) *I had a feeling there's be no way around shooting it out with the rebel soldiers.*

(62) *The police were forced to shoot it out with the bank robbers.*

- *sparks fly* ‘a discussion becomes heated or lively; there is a lot of animosity, arguing, or angry tension (between two people); there is a lot of romantic and sexual chemistry (between two people); very excited by or interested in each other, often in a sexual way’ (contexts 63–67):

(63) *The two managers have drastically different ideas of how the business should be run, so sparks fly whenever they are in a meeting together.*

(64) *They are not afraid to tackle the issues or let the sparks fly when necessary.*

(65) *Tempers flare and sparks fly with great ferocity as the couple argue.*

(66) *Sparks flew when I first met my husband. We just had a natural connection that has survived to this day.*

(67) *Whenever these two actors are on screen, sparks fly.*

- *be at each other's throats* ‘(of people or organizations) quarrel or fight persistently; of two or more people, to be noticeably and aggressively angry with each other’ (context 68):

(68) *Those two are at each other's throats because they can't agree on how to best lead the committee. You can hear their shouting all the way down the hall!*

- *fight tooth and nail* ‘fight very fiercely; to physically fight or resist someone or something with great ferocity; by extension, to resist, oppose, or stand up against someone or something with great intensity and tenacity; to fight, battle, or compete with great ferocity, vigor, and intensity’ (contexts 69–74):

(69) *A man jumped me in the dark alley, but I fought him tooth and nail and managed to drive him away.*

(70) *She fought the guards tooth and nail as they escorted her out of the building.*

(71) *The senator vowed to fight the proposal tooth and nail.*

(72) *The government has fought us tooth and nail on this issue, but we finally managed to win in court.*

(73) *I know my brother has fought tooth and nail to be re-elected, so his victory tonight is certainly well earned.*

(74) *These elite troops have been selected by the royal palace to fight tooth and nail against any possible invaders.*

- *trail (drag) your coat* ‘deliberately provoke a quarrel or fight; to incite an argument’ (context 75):

(75) *With a comment like that, she is clearly trailing her coat, and I refuse to take the bait.*

- *try a fall with* ‘contend with; to spar, compete, contend with someone’ (contexts 76–77):

(76) *She quickly proved to be an exceptionally talented wrestler, willing to try a fall with anyone from the surrounding areas.*

(77) *I was nervous about trying a fall with a renowned economist in the debate, but I think I did a pretty good job.*

- *a war (battle) of nerves* ‘a struggle in which opponents try to wear each other down by psychological means; psychological warfare used to wear down an adversary’s resolve through fear tactics’ (contexts 78–81):

(78) *The dictator’s threats against the sovereign nation he was trying to conquer became a war of nerves as the citizens worried about the future of their country.*

(79) *Election cycles have become a war of nerves as both parties continually try to scare the voters into electing their representative.*

(80) *But, in the war of nerves now going on between the two sides in the crisis, it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate the leaders’ real intentions from their propaganda tactics.*

(81) *It’s part of the psychological warfare – the battle of nerves – that’s been going on for some time.*

- *on the warpath* ‘ready and eager for confrontation; extremely angry and seeking retribution; very angry and getting ready for an argument or fight’ (contexts 82–84):

(82) *I’d avoid the boss if I were you – he’s been on the warpath since he found out we lost the Jefferson account.*

(83) *Nolan was on the warpath after reading a bad review of his restaurant.*

(84) *The message is that consumers are on the warpath – and governments should beware.*

- *wigs on the green* ‘violent or unpleasant developments; ructions; a physical fight’ (context 85):

(85) *Conversation is very tense whenever Sir George and Lord Philip are together. I anticipate wigs on the green the next time they meet.*

**Conclusions.** The main explanatory dictionaries of the English language define the following as the key qualifying features of the conflict: argument, disagreement, fighting. The selected English phraseological units describe mainly such aspects of conflict interaction as confrontation, contest, disagreement, discussion, dispute, dissension, enmity, fight, misunderstanding, skirmish, struggle, etc. So, the conflictogenic potential of English phraseology is exceptionally large.

In the future, we plan to compile a complete ideographic classification of phraseological units that describe various aspects of conflict interaction.

### References

1. Cacciari C., Tabossi P. Idioms: Processing, Structure, and Interpretation. 1993.
2. Cambridge Dictionary. URL: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/conflict> (date of access: 15.03.2022).
3. Collins English Dictionary. URL: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/conflict> (date of access: 15.03.2022).
4. Glucksberg S. Understanding figurative language: From metaphors to idioms. URL: <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2001-18106-000> (date of access: 15.03.2022).
5. Kövecses Z. Metaphor: A Practical Introduction. URL: [https://www.kspu.edu/FileDownload.ashx/kovecses\\_z\\_metaphor\\_a\\_practical\\_introduction.pdf?id=51f87bdd-ad35-4018-a05c-5f0d1fe0b5e2](https://www.kspu.edu/FileDownload.ashx/kovecses_z_metaphor_a_practical_introduction.pdf?id=51f87bdd-ad35-4018-a05c-5f0d1fe0b5e2) (date of access: 15.03.2022).
6. Kvetko P. English Lexicology in Theory and Practice. URL: [https://www.academia.edu/41449301/Pavol\\_kvetko\\_english\\_lexicology\\_in\\_theory\\_and\\_practice](https://www.academia.edu/41449301/Pavol_kvetko_english_lexicology_in_theory_and_practice) (date of access: 15.03.2022).
7. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. URL: <https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/conflict> (date of access: 15.03.2022).
8. Macmillan Dictionary. URL: [https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/conflict\\_1](https://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/conflict_1) (date of access: 15.03.2022).
9. McPherron P., Randolph P. T. Cat Got Your Tongue? *Recent Research and Classroom Practices for Teaching Idioms to English Learners around the World*. 2014. P. 264–266.
10. Seidl J., McMordie W. English idioms. 15th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chicago. 1988. 272 p.
11. Strakšiene M. Analysis of Idiom Translation Strategies from English into Lithuanian. URL: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228608667\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Idiom\\_Translation\\_Strategies\\_from\\_English\\_into\\_Lithuanian](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228608667_Analysis_of_Idiom_Translation_Strategies_from_English_into_Lithuanian) (date of access: 15.03.2022).

### Used sources

1. Siefring J. The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms. New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2004. 340 p.
2. The Free Dictionary's Idioms dictionary. URL: <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/> (date of access: 15.03.2022).

## CONFLICTOGENIC POTENTIAL OF ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGY

Iryna Harbera

Department of General and Applied Linguistics and Slavic Philology, Vasyl' Stus Donetsk National University, Ukraine.

### Abstract

**Background:** In phraseological units, as a unique, peculiar figurative and evaluative verbal fund, information is stored about the sociocultural experience of the nation, in particular its attitude

to conflicts, rules of conduct in them, ways to resolve them. Therefore, the problem of studying the role of phraseological units in the creation, deployment and completion of a conflict situation is relevant for modern linguistics.

**Purpose:** The purpose of the article is to determine the conflictogenic potential of English phraseology. To do this, it is necessary to complete the following tasks: 1) to describe the key semantic features of the concept of «conflict»; 2) on their basis, make a selection of the corresponding English phraseological units (plus the contexts of their use), which most clearly and vividly describe one or another feature of the conflict interaction; 3) to draw a conclusion about how great the conflictogenic potential of English phraseology is.

**Results:** The main explanatory dictionaries of the English language define the following as the key qualifying features of the conflict: argument, disagreement, fighting. The selected English phraseological units describe mainly such aspects of conflict interaction as confrontation, contest, disagreement, discussion, dispute, dissension, enmity, fight, misunderstanding, skirmish, struggle, etc.

**Discussion:** The conflictogenic potential of English phraseology is exceptionally large. In the future, we plan to compile a complete ideographic classification of phraseological units that describe various aspects of conflict interaction.

**Keywords:** English phraseology, conflictogenic potential, linguistic conflictology, phraseological unit.

#### Vitae

Iryna Harbera is Ph.D. in Philology, Assistant Professor of the Department of General and Applied Linguistics and Slavic Philology, Vasyl' Stus Donetsk National University, Ukraine. Her areas of research interests include English phraseology, linguistic conflictology, linguoculturology, psycholinguistics.

**Correspondence:** [iryna.harbera@gmail.com](mailto:iryna.harbera@gmail.com)

Надійшла до редакції 07 квітня 2022 року  
Рекомендована до друку 23 квітня 2022 року