

PHRASEOLOGY

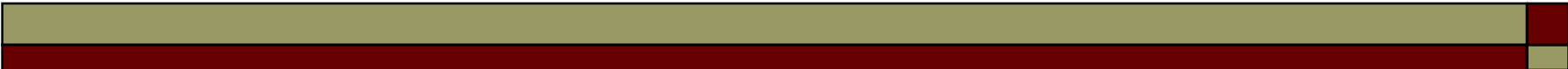
Lecture 13



1. PHRASEOLOGY AND PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

Phraseology is a branch of linguistics which studies different types of set expressions, which like words name various objects and phenomena.

They exist in the language as ready-made units.

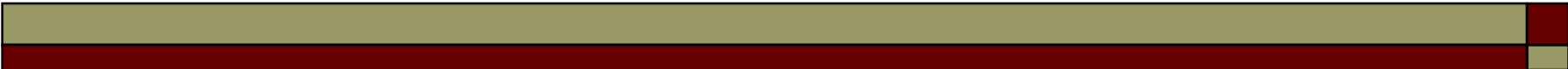


A Phraseological unit (PU) can be defined as a non-motivated word-group that cannot be freely made up in speech, but is reproduced as a ready-made unit.

It is a group of words whose meaning cannot be deduced by examining the meaning of the constituent lexemes.

The essential features of PU are:

- 1) lack of motivation;
- 2) stability of the lexical components.



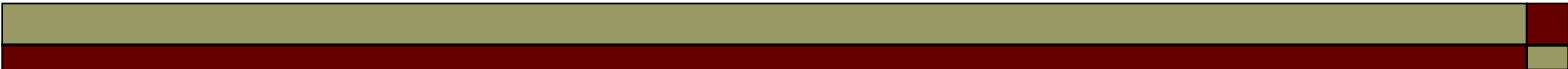
A dark horse - is actually not a horse but a person about whom no one knows anything definite.

A bull in a china shop - a clumsy person.

A white elephant – it is a waste of money because it is completely useless.

The green-eyed monster is jealousy, the image being drawn from Othello.

To let the cat out of the bag - to let some secret become known.



To bark up the wrong tree (Am) means ‘to follow a false scent; to look for somebody or something in a wrong place; to expect from somebody what he is unlikely to do’.

The idiom is not infrequently used in detective stories:
The police are barking up the wrong tree as usual, i.e. they suspect somebody who has nothing to do with the crime.

The ambiguity of these interesting word-groups may lead to an amusing misunderstanding, especially for children who are apt to accept words at their face value.

- Little Johnnie (crying): Mummy, mummy, my auntie Jane is dead.

- Mother: Nonsense, child! She phoned me 5 minutes ago.



Little Johnnie: But I heard Mrs. Brown say that her neighbours **cut her dead**.

To **cut somebody dead** means ‘to rudely ignore somebody; to pretend not to know or recognize him’.



Puns are frequently based on the ambiguousness of idioms:

- Isn't our Kate a marvel! I wish you could have seen her at the Harrisons' party yesterday. If I'd collected **the bricks she dropped** all over the place, I could built a villa'.

To drop a brick means 'to say unintentionally a quite indiscreet or tactless thing that shocks and offended people'.

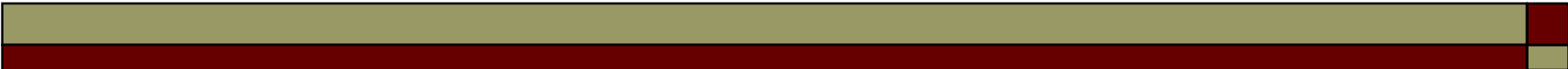


The author of the “Book of English Idioms”

Collins writes: “In standard spoken and

~~written English today idioms is an established~~
and essential element that, used with care,
ornaments and enriches the language.”

Used with care is an important warning because speech overloaded with idioms loses its freshness and originality. Idioms, after all, are ready-made speech units, and their continual repetition sometimes wears them out: they lose their colours and become trite clichés.




In modern linguistics, there is considerable confusion about the terminology associated with these word-groups

Most Russian scholars use the term “**phraseological units**” introduced by academician V.V. Vinogradov.

The term “**idiom**” used by western scholars has comparatively recently found its way into Russian phraseology but is applied mostly to only a certain type of phraseological unit.

There are some other terms: **set-expressions, set-phrases, phrases, fixed word-groups, collocations.**

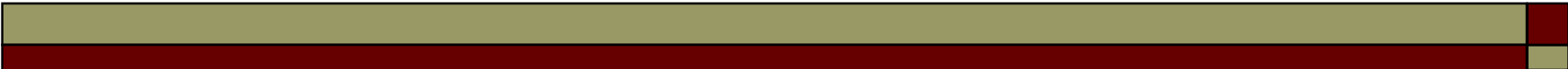


The ‘freedom’ of free word-groups is relative and arbitrary.

Nothing is entirely ‘free’ in speech as its linear relationships are governed, restricted and regulated, on the one hand, by requirements of logic and common sense and, on the other, by the rules of grammar and combinability.

A black-eyed girl but not of a black-eyed table.

The child was glad is quite correct, but a glad child is wrong.



Free word-groups are so called not because of any absolute freedom in using them but simply because they are each time built up anew in the speech process whereas idioms are used as ready-made units with fixed and constant structures.

FREE-WORD GROUPS *vs* PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

The border-line between free or variable word-groups and phraseological units is not clearly defined.

The free word-groups are only relatively free as collocability of their member-words is fundamentally delimited by their lexical and syntactic valency.

Phraseological units are comparatively stable and semantically inseparable.

Between the extremes of complete motivation and variability of member-words and lack of motivation combined with complete stability of the lexical components and grammatical structure there are innumerable border-line cases.

There are differences between word-groups and phraseological units

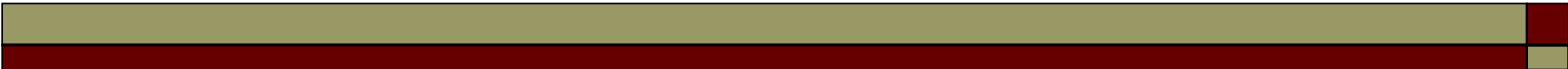
The difference often is in the interrelation of lexical components, e.g.: **Blue ribbon** (or **red, brown**, etc.), but **blue ribbon** – an honour given to the winner of the first prize in a competition – no substitution is possible in a phraseological unit;

Stretch one's legs – размять ноги, прогуляться (а не «протянуть ноги»),

See eye to eye – быть полностью согласным (а не «видеться с глазу на глаз»),

Under one's hand – за собственной подписью (а не «под рукой»),

Stew in one's own juice – страдать по своей собственной глупости (а не «вариться в собственном соку»).



In free word-groups each of its constituents preserves its denotational meaning.


In the case of phraseological units however the denotational meaning belongs to the word-group as a single semantically inseparable unit. For example, compare a free word-group *a white elephant* (белый слон) and a phraseological unit *white elephant* (обуза, подарок, от которого не знаешь как избавиться).

Distinctive features of free-word groups and phraseological units

Free word-groups	Phraseological units
1. are formed in the process of speech according to the standards of the language;	1. exist in the language side-by-side with separate words;
2. are constructed in the process of communication by joining together words into a phrase;	2. are reproduced in speech as ready-made units;

Free word-groups	Phraseological units
3. substitution is possible;	3. no substitution is possible;
4. each of its components preserves its denotational meaning;	4. the denotational meaning belongs to the word group as a single semantically inseparable unit;

Free word-groups	Phraseological units
5. less structural unity;	5. greater structural unity;
6. components may have any of the forms of their paradigm.	6. components often have just one form of all the forms of their paradigm.



Free word-groups are but relatively free: they may possess some of the features characteristic of phraseological units.

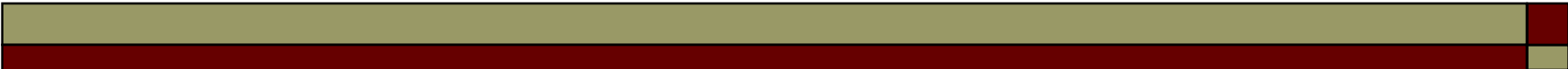
On the other hand, phraseological units are heterogeneous. Alongside absolutely unchangeable phraseological units, there are expressions that allow some degree of substitution. Phraseology is concerned with all types of set expressions including those that stand for certain sentences.

3. CLASSIFICATIONS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

3.1. SEMANTIC CLASSIFICATION OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS (V.V. Vinogradov)

is based on the motivation of the unit

1. **Phraseological fusions** are units whose meaning cannot be deduced from the meanings of their component parts. The meaning of PFs is unmotivated at the present stage of language development, e.g.
red tape (бюрократизм, волокита),
a mare's nest (иллюзия, нечто несуществующее),
My aunt! (вот те на!, вот так штука!, ну и ну!).
The meaning of the components is completely absorbed by the meaning of the whole;

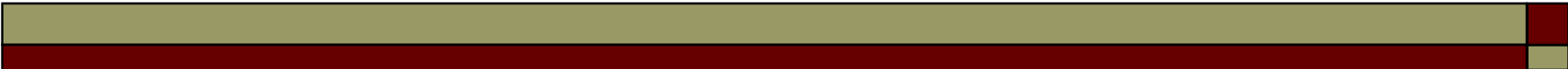


2. **Phrasological unities** are expressions the meaning of which can be deduced from the meanings of their components; the meaning of the whole is based on the transferred meanings of the components, e.g.

to show one's teeth (to be unfriendly),

to stand to one's guns (to refuse to change one's opinion), etc.

They are motivated expressions.

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3. **Phraseological collocations** are not only motivated but contain one component used in its direct meaning, while the other is used metaphorically, e.g. **to meet requirements, to attain success.**
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In this group of PUs some substitutions are possible which do not destroy the meaning of the metaphoric element, e.g. **to meet the needs, to meet the demand, to meet the necessity; to have success, to lose success.**

These substitutions are not synonymical and the meaning of the whole changes, while the meaning of the verb *meet* and the noun *success* are kept intact.

3.2. STRUCTURAL CLASSIFICATION OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS (A.I. SMIRNITSKY)

Prof. A.I. Smirnitsky classified PUs as highly idiomatic set expressions functioning as word equivalents, and characterized by their semantic and grammatical unity. He suggested three classes of stereotyped phrases:

1. **traditional phrases** (*nice distinction, rough sketch*);
2. **phraseological combinations** (*to fall in love, to get up*);
3. **idioms** (*to wash one's dirty linen in public*);

- The second group (phraseological combinations) fall into two subgroups:
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1. **one-top phraseological units**, which were compared with derived words;
 1. **verb-adverb PUs of the type to give up**, e.g. *to bring up, to try out, to look up, to drop in*, etc.
 2. **PUs of the type to be tired**, e.g. *to be surprised, to be up to*, etc.
 3. **Prepositional substantative units**, e.g. *by heart*.

2. two-top phraseological units, which were compared with compound words.

1. **attributive-nominal**, e.g. *brains trust, white elephant, blind alley*. Units of this type function as noun equivalents;
2. **verb-nominal phrases**, e.g. *to know the ropes, to take place*, etc.
3. **phraseological repetitions**, e.g. *ups and downs , rough and ready, flat as a pancake*. They function as adverbs or adjectives equivalents;
4. **adverbial multi-top units**, e.g. *every other day*.

STRUCTURAL-SEMANTIC CLASSIFICATION OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS (A.V. Koonin)

Prof. Koonin distinguishes: phraseological units, phraseomatic units and borderline (mixed) cases. phraseological units have fully or partly transferred meaning, while phraseomatic units are used in their literal meaning.

Phraseological and phraseomatic units are characterized by phraseological stability that distinguishes them from free phrases and compound words.



Prof. A.V. Koonin develops the theory of stability which consists of the following aspects:

1. stability of usage, i.e. phraseological units are reproduced ready-made, not created in speech;
2. lexical stability, i.e. the components of phraseological units are either irreplaceable or partially replaceable within the bounds of phraseological variance:

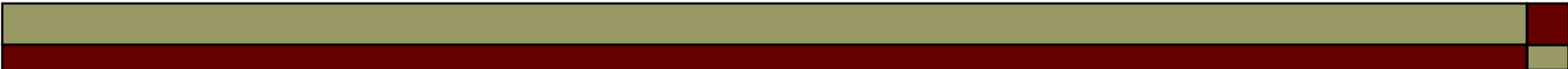
Lexical: a skeleton in the cupboard / closet (family's secret), a blind pig / tiger (to sell alcohol illegally);

Grammatical: to be in deep water / waters (to be in a difficult situation), a stony heart – a heart of stone (a stern or cruel nature);

Positional: a square peg in a round hole – a round peg in a square hole (a person in a situation unsuited to their abilities or character), to dot the i's and cross the t's – to cross one's t's and dot one's i's (ensure that all details are correct);

Quantitative: Tom, Dick and Harry – every Tom, Dick and Harry (anybody and everybody);

Mixed variants: raise/stir up the nest of hornets' nest about one's ears – to arouse/stir up the nest of hornets (to destroy the nest of wasps).

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3. **Semantic stability** is based on lexical stability of phraseological units. In spite of occasional changes the meaning of a phraseological unit is preserved. It may only be specified, made more precise, weakened or strengthened.
 4. **Syntactic stability.**

The characteristic features of phraseological units are:

1. ready-made reproduction,
2. structural divisibility,
3. morphological stability,
4. permanence of lexical composition,
5. semantic unity,
6. syntactic fixity.



Prof. A.V. Koonin's definition:

‘a phraseological unit is a stable word-group
with wholly or partially transferred meaning.’

Phraseological units are subdivided into 4
classes according to the function in
communication determined by
structural-semantic characteristics.

Functional classification

1. nominative phraseological units, standing for certain notions: **a bull in a china shop;**
2. nominative-communicative phraseological units, standing for certain notions in the Active voice, and may be used in Passive constructions: **to cross the Rubicon – the Rubicon is crossed!**
3. interjectional phraseological units, standing for certain notions: **a pretty (nice) kettle of fish! For crying out loud!**
4. communicative phraseological units standing for sentences (proverbs and sayings): **Still waters run deep. The world is a nice place.**

Communicative phraseological units, expressing statement:

1. A proverb is a collection of words (phrase or sentence that states a general truth or gives advice:

Idleness is the root of all evil.

A penny saved is a penny gained.

The pen is mightier than the sword.

Ask no questions, hear no lies.

Silence is something an answer.

Distinctive features of proverbs:

1. Structural dissimilarity

(cf: **George liked her for she never put on airs** (predicate).

Big bugs like him care nothing about small fry like ourselves (a) subject, b) prepositional object).

Proverbs, if viewed in their structural aspect, are sentences, and so cannot be used in the way in which phraseological units are used in the above examples.

2. Semantic aspect:


Proverbs could be best compared with minute fables for, like the latter, they sum up the collective experience of the community. Proverbs:

1. moralize: **Hell is paved with good intentions.**
2. give advice: **Don't judge a tree by its bark .**
3. give warning: **If you sing before breakfast, you will cry before night.**
4. admonish: **Liars should have good memories.**
5. criticize: **Everyone calls his own geese swans.**



A saying is any common, colloquial expression, or a remark often made, e.g.

1. **That cat won't jump.**
2. **Woe betide you!**
3. **The fat is in the fire .**
4. **What will Mrs. Grundy say?**



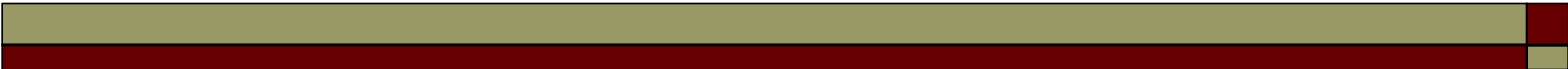
Proverbs and sayings are introduced in speech ready-made, their components are constant, and their meaning is traditional and mostly figurative.

Proverbs often form the basis for phraseological units:

It's the last straw that breaks the camel's back:
the last straw.

There no use crying over spilt milk: **cry over spilt milk, spilt milk.**

Generally proverbs and sayings are emotionally coloured.



Proverbs are short sayings that express popular wisdom, a truth or a moral lesson in a concise and imaginative way:

It never rains, but it pours.

Easy come, easy go.

A miss is as good as a mile.

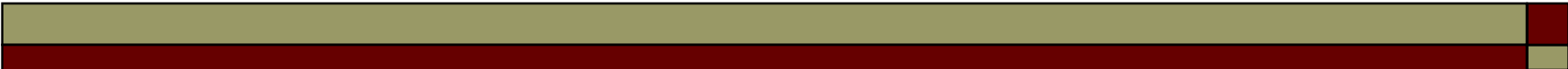
Too many chiefs and not enough Indians.

Least said, soonest mended.

Practice what one preaches.

You can't teach an old dog new tricks.

Charity begins at home.



Many proverbs and sayings are metaphorical:

Time is money.

Little drops make the mighty ocean (little drops).

Rome wasn't built in a day. (a day);

Make the mighty ocean, building Rome (a large task).

It takes two to tango (both parties involved in a situation or argument are equally responsible for it).

3.3. SEMANTIC STRUCTURE OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS BY PROF. V.N.TELIYA

The semantic structure of PUs is formed by
semantic ultimate constituents called
macrocomponents of meaning:

1. ***Denotational (descriptive) macrocomponent***
contains the information about the objective reality, it is the procedure connected with categorization, i.e. the classification of phenomena of the reality, based on the typical idea about what is denoted by a PU.



2. **Evaluation macrocomponent** contains the information about the value of what is denoted by a PU.

The rational evaluation may be:

1. *positive*, e.g. **a home from home** – ‘a place or situation where one feels completely happy and at ease’;
2. *negative*, e.g. **the lion’s den** – ‘a place of great danger’;
3. *neutral*, e.g., **in the flesh** – ‘in bodily form’.

3. **Motivational macrocomponent** correlates with the notion of the inner form of PU.

~~Motivation of a PU can be defined as the~~
aptness of ‘the literal reading’ of a unit to be associated with the denotational and evaluation aspects of meaning.

E.g., the literal reading of the PU **to have broad shoulders** is physical strength of a person. The idea is indicative of a person’s strength becomes the base for transference and forms the meaning of: ‘being able to bear the full weight of one’s responsibilities’.

4. **Emotive macrocomponent** is the contents of subjective modality expressing


feeling-relation to what is denoted by a PU within the range of approval/disapproval, e.g.

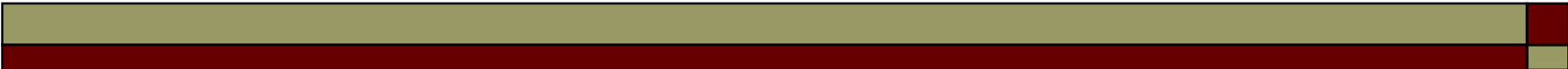
a leading light in something – ‘a person who is important in a particular group’ (approval),

to lead a cat and dog life – ‘used to describe a husband and wife who quarrel furiously with each other most of the time’ (disapproval).

5. **Stylistic macrocomponent** points to the communicative register in which a PU is used and to the social-role relationships between the participants of communication:

1. **formal**, e.g. *sick at heart* – ‘very sad’;
2. **informal**, e.g. *be sick to death* – ‘to be angry and bored because something unpleasant has been happening for too long’;
3. **neutral**, e.g. *pass by on the other side* – ‘to ignore a person who needs help’.

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6. **Grammatical macrocomponent** contains the information about all possible morphological and syntactic changes of a PU, e.g. *to be in deep water = to be in deep waters;*
- *to take away smb's breath = to take smb's breath away;*
 - *Achilles's heel = the heel of Achilles.*



7. **Gender macrocomponent** may be expressed explicitly, i.e. determined by the structure and/or semantics of a PU, and in that case it points out to the class of objects denoted by the PU: men, women, people (both men and women).

E.g., compare the PUs **every Tom, Dick and Harry** meaning ‘every or any man’ and **every Tom, Dick and Sheila** which denotes ‘every or any man and woman’.

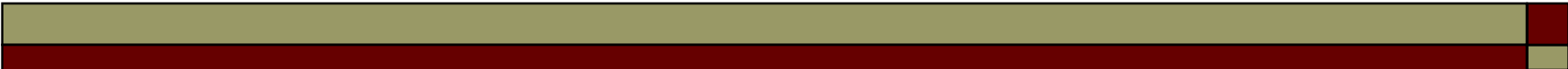
Gender macrocomponent may be expressed implicitly and then it denotes the historical reference of a phraseological unit: **to wash one's dirty linen in public**. The implicit idea about traditional women's work (cf. with Russian: *выносить сор из избы*).

The implicit gender macrocomponent is defined within the range of three conceptual spheres: masculine, feminine, intergender.

Cf. the implicitly expressed intergender macrocomponent in **to feel like royalty** meaning 'to feel like a member of the Royal Family, to feel majestic' and its counterparts, i.e. phraseological units with explicitly expressed gender macrocomponent, **to feel like a queen** and **to feel like a king**.

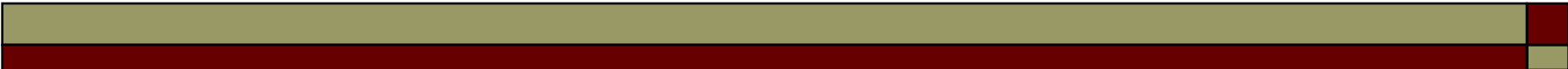
5. TYPES OF TRANSFERENCE OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

Phraseological transference is a complete or partial change of meaning of an initial word-combination (WC) or a sentence as a result of which the WC (or the sentence) acquires a new meaning and turns into a PU.




1. Transference based on simile, is the intensification of some features of an object (phenomenon, thing) denoted by a PU by means of bringing it into contact with another object (phenomenon, thing) belonging to an entirely different class. Compare:

- **(as) pretty as a picture**
- **(as) fat as a pig**
- **to fight like a lion**
- **to swim like a fish**



2. Transference based on metaphor is a likening of the object (phenomenon, action) of reality to another, which is associated with it on the basis of real or imaginable resemblance.

E.g., in the PU **to bend somebody to one's bow** meaning 'to submit someone' transference is based on metaphor, i.e. on the likening of a subordinated, submitted person to a thing (bow) a good command of which allows its owner to do with it everything he wants to.



Metaphors can bear a **hyperbolic character**:
flog a dead horse .

Metaphors may also have a **euphemistic character** which serves to soften unpleasant facts: **go to one's long rest, join the majority**
– ‘to die’.

3. Transference based on metonymy is a transfer of name from one object

(phenomenon, thing, etc.) to another based on the contiguity of their properties, relations, etc. It is conditioned by close ties between the two objects, e.g., the metonymical transference in the PU **a silk stocking** meaning ‘a rich, well-dressed man’ is based on the replacement of the genuine object (a man) by the article of clothing which was very fashionable and popular among men in the past.

4. Transference based on **synecdoche** is naming the whole by its part, the replacement of the common by the private, of the plural by the singular and vice versa. E.g., the components *flesh* and *blood* in the PU **in the flesh and blood** meaning ‘in a material form’ as the integral parts of the real existence replace a person himself or any living being. Synecdoche is usually used in combination with other types of transference, e.g. metaphor: **to hold one’s tongue** – ‘to say nothing, to be discreet’.

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