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LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS AND FUNCTIONS OF INSTAGRAM HASHTAGS

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Social media communication is becoming more and more popular today and it occupies a significant part of our everyday interaction. A hashtag as a form of tagging allows users to embed metadata in their posts, to categorize topics and make them searchable online. Hashtags appeared first on Twitter in 2007, but now have spread to other communication platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. Although a great range of disciplines investigates hashtags (IT, PR, marketing, social studies), hashtags have not yet received enough attention from linguistic research [1].

The aim of our study is to examine the characteristics of hashtags from a linguistic perspective, with a particular focus on Instagram hashtags in English.

Material and methods. The scope of the present research covers a corpus of Instagram posts published by English-speaking participants, including about 70 hashtag entries. Such methods as the descriptive method, the method of the analysis and classification were used.

Findings and their discussion. A hashtag is «a string of characters preceded by the pound symbol «#» [2, p. 46]. It allows users to add metadata to their posts, increasing the probability that their posts will be found and followed.

Hashtags were originally devised to categorize messages posted on social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Over fourteen years of use, the hashtag has not just changed the form of communication on the web and accelerated the ways of searching for information, but has become a new form of self-expression.

Though initially launched to classify the topic of a post, hashtags have now developed several functions, such as expressing emotions, supporting movements, promotion and publicity, in addition to functioning as disclaimers. Born in the online environment, hashtags have even spread to the offline world as they can now be frequently seen in TV commercials, newspaper headlines, and demonstration banners where they are used to emphasize messages.

The spread of hashtags has caused a controversy among the linguistic community. Some researchers regard them positively in the light of language change. Others, however, claim that they are ruining the language.

Among the social platforms that make use of hashtags is Instagram. Launched in 2010, Instagram has become a very popular photo-sharing and social media platform. This social network enables users to upload photos and videos which can be edited, tagged, and viewed by their followers who can browse their content and view trending posts. Hashtags help Instagram sort and organize posts in order to reach people who will value them. The significance of hashtag phenomenon is evidenced by the fact that in 2012 the symbol «#» was named the word of the year.

Let's look at the most popular hashtags on Instagram:

- #love* – 2,1 billion entries;
- #instagood* – 1,5 billion entries;
- #photooftheday* – 1 billion entries;
- #beautiful* – 797 million entries;
- #nature* – 739 million entries;
- #happy* – 678 million entries;
- #selfie* – 451 million entries
- #friends* – 430 million entries [3].

As it can be seen, these hashtags are mostly represented by single words. But the classification of hashtags offers many more different types. Caleffi examined hashtagging as a new morphological process for word formation. She proposed a tentative taxonomy of eight types of English hashtags:

- acronym/abbreviation – *#ASMR*;
- 1 word – *#marathon*;
- 2 words – *#daydreaming*;
- 3 words – *#thingsnobodysays*;
- 4 words – *#fromwhereistand*;
- 5 or more words – *#whatamidoinghere*;
- letters and numbers – *#b2bhour*;
- ?? (weird hashtags) – *#duhDumduhDumDuhDumDuhDumDuhmddu* [2].

Though initially devised to classify messages and facilitate their searchability, hashtags have developed a range of linguistic and communicative functions, offering new ways of meaning-making. During our study we have identified the following communicative functions of hashtags:

- marking the topic(s) of a post (*#vegan*, *#elections*);
- aggregation of information on a certain topic (*#LondonOlympics*);
- sharing experience and socializing (*#amazing*, *#ontopoftheworld*);
- excuse (*#hegavemeflowers*, *#theworldmustknowwhatieat*);
- providing additional information: geographic location, price, brand, ingredients, etc. (*#glutenfree*, *#thePacific*, *#iphonexcamera*);
- marketing and branding (*#maxmaragram*);
- expressing attitudes like opinions, emotions and evaluations (*#disappointed*, *#excited*);
- initiating movements (*#icebucketchallenge*; *#metoo*), etc.

To make the hashtags function properly one should follow a certain set of rules:

1. Choose a word or a set of words relevant to the subject of the message as a hashtag (for example, the hashtag *#autumn*, accompanying text and/or a photo related to autumn).

2. Transmit one thought in one hashtag.
3. Limit a number of words behind the «#» sign (a large number of words are difficult to perceive).
4. Limit a number of hashtags for a single message.
5. Use minimum of phonetic and graphic means (such as increasing the number of letters, brackets, emoticons, etc.).
6. Check the correct spelling of hashtags [4].

Conclusion. The results of this investigation suggest that hashtags are not only topic-markers and aggregators, which was their initial purpose, but that they apparently have numerous other applications. They are used for: advertising (#Apple, #Samsung); charity campaigns (#saveonelife, #IceBucketChallenge); entertainment (#MTV, #Oscars2022); sport events (#Wimbledon2021, #FIFA); political campaigns (#voteforX, #gogreen), etc.

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MEANINGS OF RUSSIAN IDIOMS

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Every language has its idioms (phraseological conventions) which sound completely meaningless to everyone, except those who have heard them since childhood. The English use the term “idiom” to denote a mode of expression peculiar to a language, without differentiating between the grammatical and lexical levels; also, or the syntactical or structural form peculiar to a given language. It may also mean a group of words whose meaning is difficult or impossible to understand from the words considered separately.

The purpose of the study is to analyze popular idioms in the Russian language that are difficult to understand for English speakers. We do not only explain their meaning, but also give their origin, give their English analogues.

Material and methods. The analyzed idioms were chosen from the list of 100 units according to their popularity. Fifty students of our university took part in the pool and ranged the suggested list of idioms. 15 popular idioms were transliterated, translated