

LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

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Phraseological units constitute an essential component of language, embodying intricate patterns and structures that go beyond individual word meanings. This paper delves into the multifaceted nature of phraseological units, exploring their various types, characteristics, and functions in linguistic communication. By examining the theoretical underpinnings and practical implications of phraseology, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of these units and their significance in language studies. Phraseological units are multi-word expressions that have specific meanings that cannot be deduced from the meanings of their individual components. These units include idioms, collocations, phrasal verbs, and other fixed expressions commonly found in language usage. The importance of phraseological units in linguistics lies in their significant impact on language comprehension, production, and cultural expression. Phraseological units constitute a fundamental aspect of language, embodying combinations of words that exhibit fixed or semi-fixed patterns and convey specific meanings. These units include idioms, collocations, fixed expressions, proverbs, and phrasal verbs, among others. What distinguishes phraseological units from free combinations of words is their lexical and syntactic cohesion, as well as their semantic unity, where the meaning of the whole exceeds the sum of its parts.

Phraseological units, also known as set expressions, idioms, or fixed combinations of words, are an integral part of any language. They reflect the cultural, historical, and cognitive worldview of a speech community. In both English and Uzbek, phraseological units serve not only a communicative function but also convey semantic depth, emotional coloring, and stylistic nuance.

For the first time, phraseology was used in the study of literature. While translating some fiction from one language into another it became impossible to translate inseparable word combinations. Then the phraseological unities in those languages were researched. The term phraseology was first used in philology in 1558 by the English literary scholar Neander. While translating the literary works Neander had to use this term. Although the biggest part of phraseological materials

are included in vocabulary and other sources, the research works on the theory of phraseology have been rarely met in the sources concerning linguistics (L. Smith, D. Curry, W. Ball, Ch. Bally). Up to now the matters of English phraseology have been studied within grammar, stylistics, lexicography and the history of language. Later phraseology has been studied as a branch of lexicology. As the linguistics developed, nowadays phraseology has been admitted and is being researched as an independent branch of linguistics in most languages. It is worth pointing out that a number of Eastern European and Russian scholars researched this field in their works. A lot of results were achieved. Though French scholar Charlie Bally put the term phraseologie into the science, this term wasn't used in the works of Western European and American linguists. Bally uses phraseology within stylistics. The matter of studying phraseology as an independent branch of linguistics was advanced by Russian linguist E.D. Polivanov. As he maintains positively, lexis studies separate words' meanings, morphology studies words' structure, syntax studies the structure of word combinations. In his opinion, there is a necessity for an independent field which studies peculiar unique word combinations. E.D. Polivanov was sure that phraseology would become firmly fixed in linguistics and it occurred. The matter of studying phraseology as a separate branch of linguistics was promoted by Russian scholar V.V. Vinogradov too. V.V. Vinogradov's great service is that he separated phraseological unities into semantic groups. However, phraseology remained a part of lexicology, because the principal criteria proving that phraseology could be an independent field of linguistics hadn't been worked out yet. So, phraseology was being learned as the part of lexicology. After E.D. Polivanov and V.V. Vinogradov the first who promoted the idea of studying phraseology independently was scholar B.A. Larin. He affirmed that enough scientific research hadn't been done in phraseology.

In English linguistics, phraseological units are traditionally categorized as idioms, collocations, proverbs, and other types of fixed expressions. According to A.V. Koonin (1996), a phraseological unit is defined as "a stable word-group with partially or fully transferred meaning." Similarly, Moon (1998) emphasizes that idioms are "fixed combinations of words whose meaning is not deducible from the individual words."

Still, the commonly used terms—such as *set-phrases*, *idioms*, and *word-equivalents*—reflect, to some degree, the central points of debate in the field of phraseology. The term *set-phrase* emphasizes the stability of both the lexical elements and the grammatical structure within these word-groups. On the other hand, *idioms* highlight the idiomatic nature of these expressions, particularly their lack of direct motivation or transparency in meaning.

Phraseological units are commonly defined as fixed, non-motivated word-groups that are not created spontaneously in speech but are used as ready-made expressions. This definition is based on the idea that the primary characteristic of phraseological units is the stability of their lexical components. Unlike the elements of free word-groups, which can change depending on communicative needs, the words in phraseological units are reproduced as fixed, unalterable combinations. Based primarily on the degree of idiomaticity, phraseological units are generally divided into three main categories: phraseological fusions, phraseological unities, and phraseological collocations.

In Uzbek linguistics, the term *frazeologik birlik* encompasses a wide range of fixed expressions that possess a figurative or culturally bound meaning. M. Mirzaev (1990) describes them as multi-word units whose meanings cannot be derived from the sum of their components⁶⁹. Scholars such as M. Qilichev and G. G'ulom have also explored their folkloric, historical, and national character, highlighting the deep integration of phraseological units in Uzbek oral and literary tradition.

In English, phraseological units are commonly classified into:

- **Idioms** – expressions whose meanings are metaphorical or non-literal (e.g., *kick the bucket, spill the beans*)
- **Collocations** – conventional word pairings (e.g., *make a decision, heavy rain*)
- **Proverbs and sayings** – concise and often metaphorical expressions of wisdom or universal truths (e.g., *A stitch in time saves nine*)
- **Phrasal verbs** – combinations of verbs and particles with idiomatic meanings (e.g., *give up, look into*)

In Uzbek, phraseological classifications are presented somewhat differently. According to M. Mirzaev (1990) and M. Qilichev (1985), the main types include:

- **Frazeologik birikmalar** (phraseological combinations) – semi-fixed expressions in which one or more components are used figuratively
Example: tili uzun – meaning someone who is overly talkative or disrespectful

- **Maqollar** (proverbs) – expressions that reflect communal wisdom and life experience

Example: Yaxshilik unutilmaydi – "Goodness is never forgotten"

- **Topishmoqlar va hikmatli so'zlar** (riddles and wise sayings) – expressions that serve both didactic and aesthetic purposes

Though both English and Uzbek share the core concept of phraseological units, their structure and source imagery differ significantly. English idioms are

⁶⁹ Mirzaev, M. O'zbek tilida frazeologik birliklarning o'rni va ularning uslubiy xususiyatlari. – Tashkent: Fan, 1990. – 250 b.

often derived from literary, nautical, or biblical traditions, whereas Uzbek phraseology is shaped by oral folklore, agrarian life, and historical experiences. For example, the English idiom “*to cry over spilt milk*” conveys the futility of regret. The Uzbek equivalent, “*so’nggi pushaymon- o’zingga dushman*”, expresses a similar idea, but through a lens of cultural pragmatism and acceptance.

Such contrasts reveal the importance of cultural background in the interpretation and usage of phraseological expressions. Understanding these aspects is essential for etymological analysis, which will be further explored in subsequent chapters.

A central characteristic of phraseological units is their semantic integrity. Unlike free word groups, the meaning of a phraseological unit is perceived holistically rather than being derived from the sum of its parts. This semantic unity, often referred to as idiomaticity, obscures the literal meanings of the individual components, rendering the overall meaning non-transparent⁷⁰

Phraseological units, also referred to as idiomatic expressions or set phrases, display a range of linguistic features that differentiate them from free combinations of words. These characteristics relate to their **semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, and stylistic** properties. Prominent linguists such as **V.V. Vinogradov**, **A.P. Cowie**, and **Rosemarie Gläser** have made substantial contributions to the theoretical framework surrounding phraseological units. V.V. Vinogradov, a prominent Russian linguist, was among the first to classify phraseological units based on the **degree of semantic cohesion**. He proposed a tripartite classification:

- **Phraseological fusions** – expressions whose meanings are completely non-transparent and cannot be inferred from their individual components. *Example: red herring* – a misleading clue or distraction, especially in arguments or narratives.

- **Phraseological unities** (e.g., *to lose one’s head*) – where meaning is metaphorical but somewhat deducible.

- **Phraseological combinations** (e.g., *to make a decision*) – where meaning is clearer and components are less fixed.

These types reflect the varying degrees to which PUs deviate from literal interpretation.

Phraseological units exhibit a high degree of formal stability. Their constituent elements are generally resistant to substitution, permutation, or syntactic

⁷⁰ Vinogradov, V. V. The Main Types of Phraseological Units in the Russian Language. – Soviet Academy of Sciences, 1944. – 150 p.

transformation. This fixedness works for their recognizability and idiomatic function within discourse⁷¹.

As Cowie (1998) notes in his work on **multi-word expressions**, phraseological units exhibit a high degree of structural rigidity. Lexical items within an idiom typically resist substitution or reordering. For instance, the idiom "*let the cat out of the bag*" remains unaltered; changing it to "*release the kitten from the sack*" renders it meaningless. However, certain variants (like passive voice or tense change) are sometimes permitted, depending on the idiom. According to Gläser (1984), PUs can fulfill various syntactic roles:

- **Nominal:** *a storm in a teacup*
- **Verbal:** *burn the midnight oil*
- **Adjectival:** *as fit as a fiddle*
- **Adverbial:** *once in a blue moon*

This shows that idioms are not limited to one grammatical category and can integrate into sentences fluidly.

Phraseological units occupy various syntactic positions and can function as different parts of speech. Despite their structural diversity, they remain fixed in their internal configuration. Their grammatical behavior is often consistent with that of simple lexical items, reinforcing their status as indivisible linguistic units (Gläser, 1994). Phraseological units often rely on metaphorical imagery, enhancing the stylistic expressiveness of speech and writing. Phraseological units are often culturally loaded and tied to the values, traditions, or historical experiences of a linguistic community. This makes **equivalence in translation** complex, often requiring functional or descriptive translations rather than literal ones. While phraseological units are generally stable, some idioms allow for limited lexical variation or grammatical inflection. Cowie distinguishes between **fixed** and **semi-fixed** expressions. For example:

- *to throw in the towel* → *threw in the towel*
- *spill the beans* → *spilled the beans*

However, most idioms resist modification, especially metaphorical or fused units. Beyond semantics and syntax, idioms also serve pragmatic functions: expressing attitudes, intensifying emotions, or softening criticism resulting in speech economy, irony, and humor, often fostering group identity and solidarity. The majority of phraseological units are underpinned by figurative language, primarily metaphor and metonymy. This figurativeness enriches the expressive

⁷¹ Cowie, A. P. *Phraseology: Theory, Analysis, and Applications*. – Oxford University Press, 1998. – 350 p.

potential of the language and allows for the compact conveyance of abstract, evaluative, or culturally specific concepts⁷².

Phraseological units frequently reflect the historical, cultural, and social contexts of their respective linguistic communities. Their origin and usage are often culturally embedded, which complicates direct equivalence across languages and makes them a significant subject in contrastive linguistics and translation studies⁷³.

While typically stable, certain phraseological units allow for limited variability, such as morphological inflection or lexical substitution within fixed parameters. This flexibility does not compromise the idiomatic integrity of the expression but indicates the dynamic nature of phraseology within linguistic evolution.

Phraseological units also perform important communicative functions. They contribute to stylistic nuance, convey speaker attitudes, and often serve pragmatic purposes such as politeness, emphasis, or irony. Their use is closely tied to discourse strategies and sociolinguistic context⁷⁴.

In conclusion, phraseological units constitute an integral part of language structure and usage, encompassing a diverse array of fixed expressions, idioms, collocations, proverbs, and phrasal verbs. Their significance lies in their ability to facilitate communication, convey meaning, and enrich the linguistic repertoire of speakers. Understanding and mastering phraseological units are essential for achieving fluency and proficiency in a language, as they reflect the intricate interplay of lexical, syntactic, and semantic elements in linguistic communication.

⁷² Dobrovol'skij, D., & Piirainen, E. *Figurative Language: Cross-cultural and Cross-linguistic Perspectives*. – Elsevier, 2005. – 290 p.

⁷³ Sabban, A. phraseology in foreign language learning and teaching. in p. burger et al. (eds.), *phraseology: an international handbook of contemporary research*. – Walter de gruyter, 2007. – 340 p.

⁷⁴ Fernando, C. *Idioms and Idiomaticity*. – Oxford University Press, 1996. – 200 p.