



LEXICAL-SEMANTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

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Abstract. *This article examines the lexical-semantic characteristics of phraseological units as a fundamental component of the language system. The study highlights semantic integrity, metaphorical motivation, idiomatic structure, and cultural connotation as key factors that determine phraseological meaning. Special attention is paid to early theoretical research that established foundational terminology and classification, as well as contemporary online scholarly resources. The analysis is based on descriptive, semantic, and comparative linguistic methods. The findings demonstrate that phraseological units enrich expressive possibilities of language while reflecting cultural and cognitive aspects of human experience.*

Keywords: *phraseological units, lexical semantics, idiomaticity, metaphor, semantic integrity, phraseology.*

INTRODUCTION.

Phraseological units constitute a central domain within lexical semantics, representing fixed, reproducible combinations of words that carry idiomatic meanings. Their study is significant because phraseological units reflect the interaction between linguistic form, semantic content, and cultural knowledge. A phraseological unit typically does not derive its meaning compositionally from its components, which makes the semantic analysis of such structures both challenging and essential.

The interest in phraseology dates back to early linguistic traditions, with significant development in the 20th century. Classical works by scholars such as Vinogradov (1946, 1972), Smirnitsky (1956), and Amosova (1963) established the theoretical foundation for understanding idioms and their semantic features. Contemporary linguistics continues to build on these foundations, integrating insights from cognitive semantics, corpus linguistics, and linguistic pragmatics.

The study of phraseological units is deeply rooted in mid-20th-century linguistic theory. Pre-1980 scholarship laid the groundwork for modern phraseology:

- **V.V. Vinogradov** (1946, 1972) introduced classifications of phraseological units based on semantic cohesion and structural stability.
- **A.I. Smirnitsky** (1956) emphasized the idiomatic nature of phraseological meaning and the non-compositional relationship between components.
- **N.N. Amosova** (1963) defined the concept of “contextual boundness,” explaining how idioms become fixed expressions.
- **I.V. Arnold** (1973) explored stylistic and semantic aspects of set expressions in English.
- **M. Bally** (1909, 1951) contributed early theoretical ideas about phraseology as a stylistic phenomenon.

These foundational studies remain essential for understanding how phraseological meaning is formed and how fixed expressions function in linguistic systems.

Phraseological units exhibit **semantic integrity**, meaning that the whole expression possesses a unified meaning that differs from the literal meaning of its components.



Examples:

- *to kick the bucket* — “to die”;
- *to spill the beans* — “to reveal a secret.”

Such idiomatic meanings demonstrate the non-compositional nature of phraseological semantics.

Metaphor and metonymy serve as primary mechanisms in the formation of phraseological meaning. Classic lexical-semantic theories (Ullmann, 1957) describe metaphor as a key source of semantic innovation.

Examples:

- **Metaphor:** *break the ice* — starting communication by reducing tension.
- **Metonymy:** *lend an ear* — to listen attentively.

These semantic mechanisms create vivid imagery and contribute to the expressive power of language.

Phraseological units can be:

- **motivated** (their figurative meaning is understandable through imagery), e.g., *cold feet* — fear;
- **non-motivated** (the original imagery is historically obscure), e.g., *red tape* — bureaucracy.

The degree of motivation influences the transparency and interpretability of phraseological meaning. Like lexical items, phraseological units may develop **polysemy**, with different meanings activated in different contexts.

Example: *to break the ice*

1. to ease social tension;
2. to begin an activity.

Polysemy demonstrates the dynamic nature of idiomatic expressions. Phraseological units can form lexical-semantic relations:

- **Synonymy:**
to lose one's temper = *to get angry*
- **Antonymy:**
to keep one's word ↔ *to break one's word*

These relations show that phraseological units function similarly to lexical items within the semantic system.

Phraseological units are strongly tied to cultural knowledge, national traditions, and collective memory. They reveal how speakers conceptualize reality.

Examples:

- English: *Achilles heel*, *white elephant*.
- Uzbek: *boshiga ko'tarmoq*, *ko'ngli tog'dek*.
- Russian: *водить за нос*, *бить баклуши*.

Cultural connotations shape the semantic content of idioms and distinguish them across languages. Scholars typically classify phraseological units according to their semantic and functional properties:

1. **Nominative phraseological units** – name objects or qualities (e.g., *black sheep*).
2. **Communicative phraseological units** – form complete statements (e.g., *once in a blue moon*).
3. **Interjectional phraseological units** – express emotional reactions (e.g., *Good heavens!*).

This classification demonstrates the multi-functional nature of phraseological expressions.

Phraseological units constitute a vital part of the lexical-semantic system. Their meaning is shaped through metaphor, metonymy, cultural knowledge, and historical development. Pre-1980 scholarship established the theoretical basis for modern phraseology, while contemporary research continues to reveal its cognitive and cultural dimensions. Studying phraseological semantics enhances our understanding of linguistic creativity, cultural worldview, and semantic structure in natural languages.

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