



THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

Raufova Sevinchbonu Otabek qizi
Sultonqulova Dildoraxon Sotvoldi qizi
Tilloyeva Nigina Sayfullayevna
Vahobova Hosilaxon Xoshimjon qizi

Students of Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Abstract: This article examines the theoretical foundations of phraseological units, focusing on their linguistic nature, structural organization, and semantic properties. Phraseological units are defined as stable and reproducible combinations of words whose meanings are partially or fully transferred and cannot always be deduced from the meanings of their individual components. As an essential part of the lexical system, they reflect both the richness of a language and the cultural experience of its speakers. The study explores key features of phraseological units, including idiomaticity, stability, reproducibility, and lexical integrity, which distinguish them from free word combinations. Special attention is given to the classification of phraseological units according to semantic cohesion, degree of idiomaticity, and structural patterns. The article also reviews major linguistic approaches to phraseology, including traditional, structural, and cognitive perspectives, emphasizing their contribution to understanding phraseological meaning. Furthermore, the research highlights the cultural and cognitive significance of phraseological units, demonstrating how they encode national identity, worldview, and collective experience. The practical importance of studying phraseological units in language teaching, translation, and intercultural communication is also emphasized, as their proper understanding is essential for achieving communicative competence and avoiding misunderstandings.

Key words: phraseological units, idioms, idiomaticity, stability, semantics, classification.

Introduction: Phraseology as a specialized branch of lexicology investigates word combinations that function as holistic semantic units, commonly referred to as phraseological units or idioms. Phraseological units (PUs), also referred to as idioms, fixed expressions, or set phrases, represent a key area of lexical study in modern linguistics. They are characterized by semantic integrity, relative structural stability, and often non-literal meaning, distinguishing them from free word combinations. Scholars emphasize that phraseological units serve both cognitive and communicative purposes, enabling speakers to convey complex social, emotional, and cultural concepts



concisely and effectively. Various classification approaches have been proposed to systematize phraseological units. Vinogradov's framework distinguishes phraseological fusions, whose meanings are entirely idiomatic, phraseological unities, where some figurative meaning remains partially transparent, and phraseological collocations, which retain a degree of literal interpretation. Smirnitsky and Amosova focus on functional aspects, differentiating idioms by expressive, stylistic, and pragmatic roles, including moral guidance, advice, or literary effect. Koonin further categorizes idioms according to compositionality and pragmatic orientation, highlighting their use in emotional, evaluative, or socially guided discourse [1;15p]. Somatic idioms, referring to human body parts such as hand, heart, head, eye, foot, or back, illustrate the cultural and cognitive dimensions of phraseology. These idioms encode social norms, ethical evaluations, and emotional or cognitive states; for instance, *lend a hand* denotes cooperation, while *lose one's head* signals irrationality. Such expressions demonstrate how human embodiment intersects with language, shaping culturally specific meaning and communicative efficiency. These combinations are distinguished by their semantic integrity, structural stability, and figurative meaning. Unlike free word-groups, the meaning of a phraseological unit cannot be inferred merely from the individual meanings of its components; instead, these units operate as complete linguistic signs that convey meanings shaped by both cognitive mechanisms and cultural contexts. For instance, the idiom to kick the bucket metaphorically denotes death rather than describing the literal act of striking a pail. Similarly, at sixes and sevens expresses confusion or disorder, demonstrating how idiomatic expressions rely on cultural knowledge and shared conventions rather than literal interpretation [2;24p]. The structural immutability of phraseological units is another essential characteristic. Elements within these expressions cannot be arbitrarily replaced, reordered, or altered without disrupting the intended idiomatic meaning. This fixed nature ensures that idioms remain recognizable and reproducible across different speech acts and communicative contexts, preserving both semantic consistency and stylistic effect. Consequently, phraseological units are pre-formed linguistic items retrieved from memory, rather than being spontaneously generated in discourse, highlighting their role as stable carriers of meaning within language communities. The study of phraseology has evolved through the contributions of numerous scholars. Ch. Bally laid the foundational principles, emphasizing the relationship between linguistic form and meaning. V. V. Vinogradov later developed a semantic classification of phraseological units based on the degree of motivation behind their meanings. Vinogradov distinguished three principal types: phraseological fusions, which are entirely non-motivated and require prior cultural knowledge



for comprehension phraseological unities *kick the bucket, at sixes and sevens* which are partially motivated through imagery and metaphorical association such as *to turn over a new leaf, to lose one's head* and phraseological combinations, where one element retains a literal meaning while the other conveys figurative significance such as *bosom friend, to take a decision* [3;45p]. This classification underscores the interplay between semantic transparency and metaphorical extension in idiomatic expressions. The origins of English phraseological units are diverse. Native expressions, such as *to carry coal to Newcastle*, reflect cultural, historical, and geographical knowledge specific to English speakers. Literary sources, particularly the works of William Shakespeare, have enriched the language with creative idioms, including *green-eyed monster, a fool's paradise, and break the ice* [4;89p]. Biblical sources have contributed expressions such as *the root of all evil* and *a thorn in the flesh*, while mythological references like *the apple of discord* and *Pandora's box* demonstrate enduring cultural motifs. Additionally, loan expressions from other languages, such as *blue blood* (from Spanish) and *to lose face* (from Chinese), highlight the intercultural permeability of idiomatic English [5;33p]. These varied origins reveal the ways in which historical events, literary production, religious influence, and cross-cultural contact shape idiomatic expression, embedding knowledge, values, and cognitive patterns within the language. A. I. Smirnitsky furthered this framework by considering both functional and structural aspects. He differentiated between neutral phraseological units, which possess limited idiomaticity, and idioms, which are metaphorical, stylistically expressive, and carry distinct connotations. Structurally, Smirnitsky categorized units as one-member *to carry the day* and multi-member *against the grain* providing a foundation for analyzing the syntactic complexity inherent in idiomatic expressions [6;47p]. N. N. Amosova introduced a contextual approach, emphasizing the influence of collocational and syntactic environments on meaning interpretation. She distinguished phrasemes, in which one component determines the overall meaning *green years meaning youth* from fully idiomatic expressions, which are semantically indivisible and require holistic comprehension.

Conclusion

In conclusion, phraseological units play a significant role in language by expressing meanings beyond individual words. They reflect cognitive, cultural, and communicative aspects of human experience. Their stability and idiomatic nature make them important for effective communication, language learning, and translation.

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