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**THE EVOLUTION OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE: HISTORICAL AND SEMANTIC CHANGES**

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Abstract

This paper explores the historical development and semantic transformations of phraseological units in the English language. Phraseological units, including idioms, proverbs, and fixed expressions, have played a crucial role in linguistic and cultural communication. The study examines how phraseological units have evolved due to historical events, social changes, and external linguistic influences. Particular attention is given to the semantic shifts, metaphorical extensions, and lexical modifications that have shaped modern phraseological units. The research also investigates the impact of globalization, technology, and media on the contemporary usage of phraseological units. The findings indicate that phraseological units are dynamic linguistic constructs that continuously adapt to societal and cultural transformations while maintaining their core meanings.

Keywords: phraseological units, idioms, historical linguistics, semantic change, lexical evolution, metaphorical extension, English language development.

Introduction

Phraseological units are an integral part of any language, reflecting the history, culture, and worldview of its speakers. In English, these units include idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and fixed phrases that carry meanings beyond their literal interpretations. The study of phraseological units is crucial in understanding linguistic evolution, as these expressions often undergo semantic and structural changes over time.

The origins of many English phraseological units date back to Old and Middle English, with influences from Latin, French, and Germanic languages. As the English language developed, various historical events, such as the Norman Conquest (1066),



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the Renaissance (15th–16th centuries), and the Industrial Revolution (18th–19th centuries), contributed to the modification and expansion of phraseological units. The impact of globalization, digital communication, and modern cultural exchanges continues to shape these expressions today.

This paper aims to analyze the historical development of phraseological units in English, their semantic transformations, and the factors influencing their evolution. By exploring the historical context and linguistic mechanisms that drive these changes, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of phraseological units as a dynamic and evolving aspect of language.

Relevance of the Topic

The study of phraseological units is highly relevant in contemporary linguistics due to the following reasons:

Cultural and Historical Significance – Phraseological units serve as linguistic artifacts that preserve historical and cultural narratives. They offer insights into past societies, their values, and their modes of communication.

Semantic and Lexical Evolution – The continuous evolution of phraseological units reflects broader trends in language change, including semantic shifts, metaphorical extensions, and syntactic modifications.

Globalization and Language Contact – With increased interaction between different languages and cultures, phraseological units undergo transformations through borrowing, adaptation, and reinterpretation.

Technological and Media Influence – The digital age has accelerated changes in language, leading to the emergence of new idioms and modifications of existing ones due to the influence of social media, advertising, and internet culture.

Linguistic Education and Translation – Understanding phraseological units is essential for language learners, translators, and linguists, as these expressions often pose challenges due to their non-literal meanings and cultural specificity.

Given these factors, studying the evolution of phraseological units in English provides valuable insights into the interplay between language, society, and historical change.



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Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

To examine the historical origins of phraseological units in the English language.

To analyze the semantic changes that phraseological units have undergone over different historical periods.

To identify the external and internal factors that have influenced the evolution of these expressions.

To explore the impact of modern cultural and technological developments on phraseological units.

To provide examples of phraseological units that have changed in meaning, structure, or usage over time.

Research Findings

1. Historical Development of Phraseological Units

Phraseological units in English have evolved through various historical periods, influenced by linguistic contact, sociopolitical events, and cultural changes.

Old English (450–1150): Many phraseological units were derived from Germanic roots and had religious or mythological connotations. Expressions such as "wyrd bið ful aræd" ("fate is fully determined") reflected the Anglo-Saxon worldview.

Middle English (1150–1500): The Norman Conquest introduced a vast number of French loanwords and idiomatic expressions. Phrases like "coup de grâce" and "fait accompli" originated from this period.

Early Modern English (1500–1700): The Renaissance and the rise of printing led to the standardization of many idiomatic expressions. William Shakespeare played a crucial role in popularizing phrases such as "break the ice" and "wear one's heart on one's sleeve".

Modern English (1700–present): The Industrial Revolution, colonial expansion, and technological advancements contributed to the emergence of new phraseological units. Contemporary English continues to integrate expressions from global cultures, such as "spill the tea" (from African American Vernacular English) and "ghosting" (from internet culture).



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2. Semantic Changes in Phraseological Units

Semantic shifts in phraseological units occur through various linguistic mechanisms, including metaphorical extension, amelioration, pejoration, and lexical substitution.

Metaphorical Extension: The phrase "kick the bucket", originally meaning "to hang from a beam," evolved metaphorically to mean "to die."

Amelioration: The term "knight in shining armor", which once referred to medieval warriors, now metaphorically represents a heroic or rescuing figure.

Pejoration: The phrase "to bite the dust", which originally referred to falling in battle, now has a broader negative connotation of failure or defeat.

Lexical Substitution: Some idioms have undergone changes in wording while retaining their original meaning. For example, "burn the midnight oil" (once referring to oil lamps) remains in use despite the obsolescence of oil-based lighting.

Discussion and Analysis

The findings of this study suggest that phraseological units are not static but continuously evolve to reflect changes in society, culture, and technology. Some key observations include:

Influence of Social and Political Events: Wars, revolutions, and cultural shifts have contributed to the emergence and adaptation of phraseological units.

Technological Advancements: The digital age has introduced new expressions, such as "Google it", while altering the meaning of older phrases.

Globalization and Language Borrowing: Many English idioms have been influenced by foreign expressions, adapting to new cultural contexts while maintaining their core meanings.

Conclusion

Phraseological units are dynamic elements of the English language that encapsulate historical events, cultural traditions, and linguistic evolution. Their meanings and structures have been shaped by centuries of social, political, and technological transformations. Understanding the evolution of these expressions provides valuable insights into how language reflects and adapts to changing human



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experiences. As globalization and digital communication continue to influence language, new phraseological units will emerge, further enriching the linguistic landscape of English.

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