

SEMANTIC AND PRAGMATIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

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Abstract

This article examines the semantic and pragmatic characteristics of phraseological units as stable and culturally marked linguistic expressions. Phraseological units are not ordinary combinations of words; they represent fixed or semi-fixed language structures with figurative meaning, expressive force, and communicative value. The study focuses on the relationship between the semantic structure of phraseological units and their pragmatic functions in discourse. From the semantic point of view, phraseological units are characterized by idiomaticity, semantic integrity, metaphorical meaning, emotional colouring, and cultural specificity. From the pragmatic point of view, they are used to express evaluation, emotion, irony, politeness, criticism, encouragement, social attitude, and speaker intention. The article applies a descriptive-analytical method based on theoretical sources in phraseology, semantics, pragmatics, and cognitive linguistics. The results show that phraseological units serve not only as expressive lexical means but also as important tools of communication. They help speakers influence the listener, create emotional impact, mark social relations, and transmit cultural values. The study concludes that semantic and pragmatic analysis of phraseological units is important for linguistics, translation studies, language teaching, and intercultural communication.

Keywords: phraseological units, semantics, pragmatics, idiom, figurative meaning, discourse, cultural linguistics, communicative function.

Introduction

Phraseological units are one of the most expressive and culturally significant elements of language. They reflect the historical experience, worldview, emotional perception, and social values of a speech community. Unlike free word combinations, phraseological units are reproduced in speech as stable expressions and usually have a figurative meaning. For example, expressions such as *to break the ice*, *a piece of cake*, *to lose one's head*, *ko 'ngli tog 'dek ko 'tarildi*, *yuragi orqasiga tortdi*, or *og 'ziga talqon solmoq* cannot be interpreted only through the literal meanings of their components. Their real meaning is formed through figurative, cultural, and contextual interpretation.

The study of phraseological units is important because they stand at the intersection of semantics, pragmatics, culture, cognition, and discourse. Semantics explains what phraseological units mean, how their meaning is formed, and why their meaning is often non-literal. Pragmatics explains how these units are used in real communication, what intention the speaker expresses through them, and what effect they produce on the listener. Therefore, phraseological units cannot be fully understood if they are studied only as dictionary items. They must be analyzed in context, because their communicative force depends on the situation, speaker-listener relationship, tone, intention, and cultural background.

The relevance of this topic is connected with several factors. First, phraseological units are widely used in everyday speech, literature, journalism, political discourse, education, and media. Second, they create difficulties in translation because literal translation often destroys their figurative and pragmatic meaning. Third, phraseological competence is an important part of foreign language learning. A learner may know grammar and basic vocabulary but still misunderstand native speech if they do not understand idioms and phraseological expressions. Fourth, phraseological units reveal national-cultural features of language, because many of them are based on customs, traditions, social values, religion, history, and collective experience.

The aim of this article is to analyze the semantic and pragmatic characteristics of phraseological units. The objectives are: to define the main semantic features of phraseological units; to identify their pragmatic functions in discourse; to explain the relationship between figurative meaning and communicative intention; and to show the importance of phraseological units in language use.

Literature Review

Phraseology as a branch of linguistics has been studied by many scholars. Researchers such as V. V. Vinogradov, A. V. Kunin, Ch. Fernando, A. P. Cowie, R. Moon, and Z. Kövecses made important contributions to the classification and interpretation of phraseological units. In Uzbek linguistics, scholars such as Sh. Rahmatullayev, A. Mamatov, B. Yo'ldoshev, and others studied the structure, semantics, stylistic functions, and national-cultural features of Uzbek phraseological units.

In traditional phraseology, phraseological units are usually described according to their stability, idiomaticity, and reproducibility. Stability means that the components of the unit are relatively fixed. For example, in the expression *to kick the bucket*, the words cannot be freely changed without destroying the idiomatic meaning. Idiomaticity means that the general meaning of the expression is not equal to the sum

of the meanings of its components. Reproducibility means that such expressions are not created anew each time but are used as ready-made units in speech.

Semantic studies of phraseology focus on figurative meaning, metaphor, metonymy, semantic transformation, and emotional-expressive colouring. Cognitive linguistics has shown that many phraseological units are based on conceptual metaphors. For example, emotional states are often expressed through body parts, movement, temperature, space, colour, or physical action. Expressions such as *to lose one's head*, *cold-hearted*, *to carry a burden*, or *yuragi muzlab ketdi* are based on metaphorical thinking.

Pragmatic studies, however, focus on how phraseological units function in actual communication. A phraseological unit may express not only information but also attitude, evaluation, irony, politeness, solidarity, criticism, or emotional pressure. For instance, when a speaker says *That exam was a piece of cake*, the phrase does not simply mean that the exam was easy. It also shows the speaker's confidence, informal tone, and evaluative attitude. Similarly, when an Uzbek speaker says *uning ko'ngli tog'dek ko'tarildi*, the expression communicates not only happiness but also emotional intensity and positive evaluation.

Thus, modern linguistic analysis requires an integrated semantic-pragmatic approach. Such an approach allows researchers to understand both the internal meaning of phraseological units and their external communicative function.

Methodology

The article uses a descriptive, analytical, and comparative method. The object of the study is phraseological units as stable linguistic expressions with figurative meaning. The subject of the study is their semantic and pragmatic characteristics. The analysis is based on theoretical works in phraseology, semantics, pragmatics, cognitive linguistics, and discourse analysis.

The methodological process includes three stages. First, the semantic features of phraseological units are analyzed. These include idiomaticity, semantic integrity, metaphorical meaning, emotional colouring, and cultural specificity. Second, the pragmatic functions of phraseological units are examined. These include evaluation, emotional expression, irony, politeness, persuasion, criticism, encouragement, and social positioning. Third, the relationship between semantic meaning and pragmatic use is interpreted through examples from English and Uzbek.

The study is qualitative rather than quantitative. Its purpose is not to count phraseological units but to explain how they create meaning and how they function in communication. This approach is appropriate for a local academic thesis or conference

article because it gives a clear theoretical explanation and demonstrates practical linguistic relevance.

Results

The analysis shows that phraseological units have several important semantic characteristics.

First, phraseological units are marked by semantic integrity. This means that the expression functions as a single semantic whole. For example, *to spill the beans* means “to reveal a secret,” not literally to pour beans somewhere. Uzbek *og‘ziga talqon solmoq* means “to keep silent,” not literally to put flour into one’s mouth. The meaning belongs to the whole expression, not to separate words.

Second, phraseological units are often idiomatic. Idiomaticity makes them different from ordinary word combinations. A learner cannot always understand them through direct translation. For example, *under the weather* means “ill” or “not feeling well,” while *boshi osmonga yetdi* means “to be extremely happy.” The literal meaning and the actual meaning are different.

Third, phraseological units are metaphorical. Many of them are based on conceptual metaphors. For example, happiness may be expressed as upward movement: *to be on cloud nine*, *boshi osmonga yetmoq*. Fear may be expressed through bodily reaction: *one’s heart sank*, *yuragi orqasiga tortdi*. Difficulty may be expressed as weight or burden: *to carry a heavy load*, *yelkasiga og‘ir yuk tushdi*.

Fourth, phraseological units have emotional and expressive colouring. They make speech more vivid and powerful. Instead of saying “he was very afraid,” a speaker may say *he was scared to death*. Instead of saying “u juda xursand bo‘ldi,” an Uzbek speaker may say *uning boshi osmonga yetdi*. Such expressions intensify meaning and create emotional effect.

Fifth, phraseological units are culturally specific. They reflect the national worldview and social experience of the people. Some expressions are based on everyday life, customs, professions, religious ideas, animals, food, body parts, or natural phenomena. Because of this, phraseological units are often difficult to translate. A literal translation may sound strange or meaningless in another language.

From the pragmatic point of view, phraseological units perform several communicative functions.

The first function is evaluation. Speakers use phraseological units to express positive or negative judgement. For example, *a man of his word* gives a positive evaluation of a person’s reliability. *To have a heart of stone* gives a negative evaluation of someone’s cruelty or lack of compassion. In Uzbek, *yuragi keng* positively describes a generous and tolerant person, while *yuragi qora* gives a negative moral evaluation.

The second function is emotional expression. Phraseological units help speakers express sadness, happiness, fear, anger, surprise, hope, or disappointment. For example, *my heart sank* expresses sudden disappointment or fear. Uzbek *yuragi ezildi* expresses deep sadness or compassion. These units make emotion more concrete and expressive.

The third function is persuasion and influence. A speaker may use phraseological units to make speech more convincing. For example, *Don't lose heart* is not only a statement but also an encouragement. It motivates the listener. In Uzbek, *ruhingizni tushirmang* or *yuragingizni keng qiling* can function as emotional support and advice.

The fourth function is irony and criticism. Phraseological units may be used to criticize someone indirectly. For example, *He thinks he is the center of the universe* criticizes arrogance. Uzbek *burni ko'tarilib ketdi* also expresses criticism of pride or arrogance. Such expressions allow speakers to express negative attitude more vividly than neutral words.

The fifth function is politeness and indirectness. In communication, direct criticism may sound rude. Phraseological units can soften or hide criticism. For example, saying *He is not the sharpest tool in the shed* is less direct than saying "He is stupid," although it still carries negative evaluation. In Uzbek, indirect expressions are also widely used to preserve respect and social balance.

The sixth function is cultural identification. Phraseological units show that a speaker belongs to a certain linguistic and cultural community. Native speakers often use idioms naturally, while non-native speakers may struggle to understand them. Therefore, phraseological competence is part of cultural competence.

Discussion

The results show that phraseological units should be analyzed as both semantic and pragmatic phenomena. Their semantic side explains their figurative meaning, while their pragmatic side explains their communicative purpose. These two aspects are inseparable. A phraseological unit becomes meaningful in communication because its figurative meaning is activated in a specific context.

For example, the English phrase *to break the ice* semantically means to begin communication in an unfamiliar or uncomfortable situation. Pragmatically, it functions as a description of social interaction and may also evaluate someone's communicative skill. The Uzbek expression *gapning po'st kallasi* semantically refers to the main point of a matter, while pragmatically it signals that the speaker wants to move directly to the essential issue. In both cases, phraseological meaning is connected with communicative intention.

Another important point is that phraseological units often carry implicit meaning. The speaker may say one thing but imply more. For example, *He has a long tongue* does not simply describe a person's speech habit; it implies that the person talks too much or cannot keep secrets. Uzbek *tili uzun* may express a similar negative evaluation. This shows that phraseological units are closely connected with implicature, speaker attitude, and social judgement.

The pragmatic use of phraseological units also depends on register and context. Some expressions are formal, some are informal, some are humorous, and some may sound rude. For example, *to pass away* is a polite euphemistic expression, while *to kick the bucket* is informal and may be inappropriate in serious contexts. Therefore, knowing the meaning of a phraseological unit is not enough. The speaker must also know where, when, and with whom it can be used.

In translation, semantic and pragmatic equivalence must be considered together. A literal translation may preserve words but lose meaning. A semantic translation may preserve meaning but lose emotional force. A good translation should preserve the communicative function. For example, *a piece of cake* should not be translated literally; it should be rendered as *juda oson ish* or an equivalent Uzbek expression depending on context. Similarly, Uzbek *ko'ngli tog'dek ko'tarildi* may be translated as *he/she was overjoyed* rather than literally "his/her heart rose like a mountain."

For language teaching, phraseological units should be taught in context, not as isolated vocabulary. Students should learn their meaning, usage, emotional tone, register, and cultural background. Otherwise, they may use idioms incorrectly and create communicative misunderstanding.

Conclusion

Phraseological units are complex linguistic phenomena that combine semantic stability, figurative meaning, cultural information, and pragmatic force. Their semantic characteristics include idiomaticity, semantic integrity, metaphorical structure, emotional colouring, and cultural specificity. Their pragmatic characteristics include evaluation, emotional expression, persuasion, criticism, politeness, indirectness, and cultural identification.

The study shows that phraseological units are not decorative elements of language. They are active communicative tools that help speakers express attitude, influence listeners, create emotional effect, and transmit cultural meanings. Therefore, the analysis of phraseological units requires an integrated semantic-pragmatic approach.

For local academic research, this topic is relevant and manageable. However, for a stronger article, the topic should be narrowed to a specific language, language pair,

semantic field, or discourse type. For example: “Semantic and Pragmatic Characteristics of Somatic Phraseological Units in English and Uzbek” would be more concrete and scientifically stronger than the general title.

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