

STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS AND SEMANTIC FEATURES OF NOMINAL PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

Negmatova Mukarram Ulugbekovna

SamSIFL the faculty of English language

The speciality of foreign language and literature

Student of Master's degree

mukarramnematova0@gmail.com

+998979433839

Abstract: This article examines the structural characteristics and semantic features of nominal phraseological units as an essential component of the phraseological system of the English language. Nominal phraseological units are analyzed as fixed or semi-fixed word combinations that function syntactically as nouns and possess completely or partially reinterpreted meanings. The study focuses on their grammatical structure, stability, and reproducibility, which distinguish them from free word combinations. Special attention is paid to semantic properties such as idiomaticity, semantic integrity, evaluative meaning, and cultural specificity. The article draws on the theoretical framework of phraseological studies developed by A. V. Kunin and other prominent linguists. The analysis demonstrates that nominal phraseological units serve as expressive and cognitive tools in discourse, reflecting national culture and collective experience while enhancing communicative efficiency. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the interaction between structure and meaning in phraseology and underline the importance of nominal phraseological units in linguistic research. ¹

Key words: phraseological units, nominal phraseological units, phraseology, structural characteristics, semantic features, idiomaticity, semantic integrity, stability, fixed expressions, evaluative meaning, cultural specificity.

The study of nominal phraseological units in this article is based on well-established linguistic theories developed within phraseology and lexicology. A central role in the theoretical framework belongs to the works of A. V. Kunin, whose research laid the foundation for modern phraseological studies. In *Phraseology of Modern English and English Phraseology: Theory and Practice*, Kunin defines phraseological units as stable, reproducible combinations of words with fully or partially reinterpreted meanings.² His criteria of stability, idiomaticity, and structural fixity are essential for identifying nominal phraseological units and distinguishing them from free word

¹ Kunin, A.V. (1996). *English Phraseology: Theory and Practice*. Moscow: Vysshaya Shkola.

² Kunin, A.V. (1970). *Phraseology of Modern English*. Moscow: International Relations Publishing House.

combinations. Kunin's classification of phraseological units according to their grammatical function directly supports the analysis of nominal units functioning as nouns in discourse. Phraseological units constitute a significant part of the lexical system of a language and reflect the cultural, historical, and cognitive experience of its speakers. Among various types of phraseological units, nominal phraseological units occupy a special place due to their structural stability and semantic richness. These units function as nouns or noun phrases and name objects, persons, phenomena, or abstract concepts. The present article aims to examine the structural characteristics and semantic features of nominal phraseological units, highlighting their distinctive linguistic properties.

The Concept of Nominal Phraseological Units

Structural Characteristics of Nominal Phraseological Units: Grammatical Structure

Structurally, nominal phraseological units most commonly appear in the form of noun phrases. The typical patterns include:

Noun + prepositional phrase (a drop in the ocean)

Adjective + noun (blind alley)

Noun + noun (golden handshake)

Possessive constructions (Achilles' heel)

Despite variations in structure, these units function as a single grammatical whole and perform the role of a noun in a sentence.

Stability and Fixity

One of the defining structural features of nominal phraseological units is their lexical and grammatical stability. The components of such units are usually fixed and resistant to substitution. For instance, replacing any element in Achilles' heel would destroy its idiomatic meaning. However, some nominal phraseological units allow limited variation, especially in articles or number forms, without losing their phraseological status.

Reproducibility

Nominal phraseological units are not created spontaneously in speech; instead, they are reproduced as ready-made units. This feature distinguishes them from free word combinations and confirms their place in the phraseological system of the language.

Semantic Features of Nominal Phraseological Unit: Idiomaticity

Comparative and cross-linguistic insights are drawn from H. Burger's *Phraseology*, which, although focused on German, presents universal characteristics of phraseological units applicable to English. This supports the view that nominal phraseological units represent a common linguistic phenomenon across languages.

The most prominent semantic feature of nominal phraseological units is idiomaticity, which implies that the meaning of the whole unit does not coincide with the sum of the meanings of its components. For example, a white elephant does not denote an animal but refers to something useless or burdensome.³

Semantic Integrity

Nominal phraseological units demonstrate semantic integrity, meaning that they express a single concept. This integrity allows them to function as lexical equivalents of single words. In many cases, such units can be replaced by one-word synonyms, although the expressive or stylistic coloring may be lost.

Lexicological aspects of phraseology are also addressed in I. V. Arnold's *The English Word* and *R. S. Ginzburg et al.'s *A Course in Modern English Lexicology*. These sources examine the expressive, stylistic, and evaluative potential of phraseological units, which is particularly relevant for the semantic analysis of nominal phraseological units. Many such units convey emotional coloring, irony, or evaluation, making them powerful stylistic devices in both literary and non-literary texts.⁴

Evaluative and Expressive Meaning

Many nominal phraseological units carry a strong evaluative or emotional component. They may express approval, disapproval, irony, or metaphorical imagery. For instance, a snake in the grass conveys a negative evaluation of a deceitful person, while a breath of fresh air expresses positive assessment.

Cultural and Cognitive Aspects

The semantics of nominal phraseological units is closely connected with national culture and collective cognition. Mythological, historical, and literary sources often underlie their meanings. Units such as Pandora's box or Trojan horse illustrate how cultural knowledge is embedded in phraseology.

Functional Role in Discourse

In discourse, nominal phraseological units perform important communicative functions. They enhance expressiveness, contribute to imagery, and allow speakers to convey complex ideas concisely. Due to their metaphorical nature, they are widely used in literary texts, journalism, and everyday speech.

The theoretical distinction between free word groups and fixed expressions is elaborated in A. I. Smirnitsky's *Lexicology of the English Language*. Smirnitsky's approach helps explain the grammatical stability of nominal phraseological units and their syntactic behavior as single naming units. His work provides a structural basis for

³ Burger, H.- Phraseologie: Eine Einführung am Beispiel des Deutschen.

⁴ Arnold, I.V. (1986). *The English Word*. Moscow: Vysshaya Shkola.

analyzing nominal phraseological units as part of the lexical system rather than as syntactic constructions created in speech.⁵

The semantic aspect of nominal phraseological units is further clarified through the works of V. V. Vinogradov, who introduced the distinction between phraseological fusions, unities, and combinations. This classification is particularly important for understanding the degree of semantic cohesion and motivation in nominal phraseological units. Vinogradov's ideas contribute to the discussion of semantic integrity and the extent to which the meanings of individual components are preserved or transformed.⁶

Conclusion

Nominal phraseological units represent a complex linguistic phenomenon characterized by structural stability and semantic unity. Their fixed grammatical patterns, idiomatic meanings, and expressive potential distinguish them from free word combinations. The study of their structural and semantic features not only deepens our understanding of phraseology but also reveals the interaction between language, culture, and cognition. As an essential component of the lexicon, nominal phraseological units continue to play a vital role in effective and expressive communication.

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