

PHRASEOLOGY AS CULTURAL MEMORY AND A LINGUISTIC MICROSYSTEM

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Abstract: This article defines phraseology and its development in modern linguistics. Phraseology studies stable multiword expressions that speakers use as ready-made units in communication. These units are important because they preserve cultural experience, reflect traditions and everyday thinking, and add imagery and evaluation to speech. Phraseology first gained attention in translation and literary studies, where fixed expressions often could not be translated word-for-word. The article concludes that phraseology forms a microsystem within language and that some theoretical boundaries still remain under discussion.

Keywords: phraseology, phraseological unit, idiom, fixed expression, semantic unity, stability, microsystem.

1. INTRODUCTION

Phraseology can be described as a “store of living images” in a language. While single words name objects and actions, phraseological units show how people evaluate situations, express emotions, create humor, and transmit common cultural knowledge. For this reason, phraseology is often viewed as one of the most expressive and socially shared layers of vocabulary.

Interest in phraseology historically grew from practical needs. Translators and literary scholars noticed that many fixed expressions cannot be translated literally because their meaning is conventional and often figurative. A phrase may look like an ordinary word combination, but in real speech it functions as a single unit of meaning.

Modern linguistics does not treat phraseology only as “decorative idioms.” Phraseology includes different types of conventional multiword units: idioms, set phrases, stable comparisons, speech formulas, and other repeated patterns. In applied linguistics, these units are often discussed together with the broader concept of formulaic language [10; 13]. This approach is important for language teaching and translation because real communication depends heavily on ready-made patterns.

1.1. Literature review

For a long time, phraseology was not treated as an independent discipline. In many traditions, fixed expressions were studied within lexicology, grammar, stylistics, and lexicography. This is understandable because phraseologisms have grammatical forms, stylistic functions, and dictionary value. Early systematic attention in Western European linguistics is connected with the stylistic tradition, where stable expressions were seen as expressive tools of speech. In this context, phraseology is closely associated with stylistics in classical works [1].

Later, linguists increasingly argued that phraseology needs its own field of study. The main idea was that different branches of linguistics describe different units: lexicology studies word meaning, morphology studies word forms, and syntax studies free combinations and sentence structures. However, stable combinations with a unified meaning require special description [2]. This view supports the idea that phraseology deals with a distinct object of analysis—fixed combinations functioning as lexical units rather than freely produced syntactic phrases [2].

Within Russian linguistic traditions, phraseology was strongly developed as a research domain. A key contribution was the move toward semantic classification of phraseological units and the study of different degrees of semantic cohesion and stability [3]. At the same time, phraseology sometimes remained within lexicology because theoretical boundaries and criteria were still being refined [3]. Further methodological discussion emphasized that phraseology is a large linguistic domain and therefore requires systematic research methods and broader descriptive coverage [4]. Research on устойчивые (stable) expressions also supported the idea that fixed multiword units have their own patterns and regularities that cannot be reduced to ordinary syntax [5].

In studies of English phraseology, an important theoretical line was developed through semantic and structural analysis of English phraseological units [6]. Later work proposed a more systematic description of phraseological meaning, stability, and classification and supported phraseography as a practical tool for learning, translation, and dictionary compilation [7]. Subsequent research expanded phraseology with broader perspectives, including theoretical description and corpus-based observation of fixed expressions and idioms in English [11; 12].

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, phraseology became closely connected with research on formulaic language. This broader area studies prefabricated multiword patterns used for fluent communication and processing efficiency. Works on lexical phrases and language teaching show that multiword units are essential for learning and real use [10]. Corpus-based research demonstrates that many fixed expressions have patterns of frequency, variation, and register distribution that cannot be captured well without empirical evidence [12]. The idea that formulaic language is a core component of communication is also strongly presented in general theoretical work [13].

Uzbek phraseology and its scholarly development

Uzbek phraseological studies developed actively from the mid-20th century, and later research paid special attention to phraseological norms and the relationship between lexical meaning and phraseological meaning in Uzbek literary language [16]. In this context, Uzbek phraseology is studied not only as an expressive resource but also as a part of linguistic norm and usage, which supports both theoretical work and applied tasks such as teaching and lexicography [16].

2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A phraseological unit (phraseologism) can be defined as a language unit made of two or more words that functions as one meaning and is typically reproduced as a ready-made expression. It shows stability and often has figurative meaning. In many cases, it can be replaced by a single word or a short descriptive phrase in the same language [7; 8].

This definition fits both theoretical approaches and lexicographic practice. Phraseological dictionaries and phraseographic traditions treat these units as lexical items because their meaning is fixed at the level of the whole unit rather than at the level of separate components [7].

Based on classical phraseological theory, the key features are the following:

1. Stability (fixedness). Phraseologisms are reproduced from memory and exist in language as ready-made units [7].
2. Semantic unity. The meaning is conventional and often figurative; it cannot always be predicted from the meanings of separate words [8; 12].
3. Limited variation and limited substitution. Substituting one component often destroys the unit or changes its meaning [7; 12].
4. Lexical indivisibility. Components usually cannot be deleted without breaking the expression as a unit [6; 7].
5. Syntactic integrity. Phraseologisms behave in syntax like a single unit and can serve as a predicate, object, attribute, or adverbial modifier [7; 14].

These features explain why phraseologisms are often described as “word-like,” even though they have a multiword structure [7].

Phraseologisms vs. free word combinations

A key distinction exists between phraseologisms and free combinations. Free combinations allow substitution while keeping literal meaning, for example: *to cut bread* / *to cut cheese* / *to cut paper*. The verb remains literal and the noun can change freely.

Phraseologisms do not allow such substitution because the meaning is fixed. A classical example is *red tape*, which means bureaucracy; changing the adjective changes the meaning and removes the idiomatic sense [7; 12]. This test is widely used in phraseological description and is central to teaching idiomatic competence.

English examples (figurative meaning and stability)

- *red tape* — *bureaucracy; too many official rules*
- *brown study* — *deep, serious thought*
- *Hobson's choice* — *a "choice" with no real alternative*
- *to kick the bucket* — *to die (informal)*
- *to leave somebody in the lurch* — *to abandon someone in difficulty*
- *to set one's cap at somebody* — *to try to attract someone (old-fashioned)*
- *to stand to one's guns* — *to keep one's position; not give up*
- *to catch at a straw* — *to rely on a weak hope in a desperate situation*

These units illustrate the basic idea: the whole expression works as a single meaning unit and cannot be interpreted word-by-word without loss.

Uzbek examples (cultural imagery and evaluation)

- *Qo'y og'zidan cho'p olmagan* — *very gentle; harmless*
- *og'zi qulog'ida* — *very happy; smiling widely*
- *sirkasi suv ko'tarmaydi* — *very irritable; cannot tolerate criticism*
- *o'takasi yorilmoq* — *to become extremely frightened*
- *sichqonning ini ming tanga* — *no place to hide; a trapped situation*
- *kovushini to'g'rilab qo'ymoq* — *to drive someone away; to dismiss harshly*
- *do'ppisi yarimta* — *carefree; unconcerned*
- *yuragiga qil sig'maydi* — *extremely anxious/upset; very uneasy*

In Uzbek linguistic description, such units are treated as stable lexical items and are discussed in connection with phraseological norms and meaning relations inside the Uzbek literary language [16].

Phraseologisms are similar to words because they have unity of meaning and can function as one unit in syntax. They may also show polysemy and, in some cases, homonymy [7; 8]. However, phraseologisms differ from words in structure and formation. Words are built from morphemes, while phraseologisms are built from words and follow patterns of phrases or sentences. Words are often created through word-formation processes (affixation, compounding), while phraseologisms usually exist as established units and are not created spontaneously in speech [7]. These distinctions are described clearly in classical works on English phraseology.

3. CONCLUSION

The comparative material from English and Uzbek confirms that phraseologisms in both languages share core features: they are relatively stable in form, express a unified meaning, allow limited substitution of components, and often function in sentences like single lexical units. At the same time, the two languages frequently encode similar ideas through different cultural images and metaphors. Because of this, direct word-for-word translation is often ineffective, and translators must rely on functional equivalents, paraphrase, or other strategies that preserve meaning and pragmatic effect rather than literal form.

Overall, phraseology remains important not only for theoretical linguistics but also for translation studies, lexicography, and language teaching. It supports natural communication and cultural competence, yet it still raises unresolved questions—especially about how to draw clear boundaries between phraseological units and free combinations or compound words, and how to classify degrees of stability and idiomaticity consistently. These continuing challenges confirm that phraseology remains a productive field for further research and applied work.

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