



TOPONYMIC IDIOMS AS A REPRESENTATION OF COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract

This article examines toponymic idioms as linguistic representations of collective knowledge and cultural memory. Toponymic idioms, which contain geographical names as integral components, reflect the historical experiences, social values and cultural perceptions shared by members of a speech community. Far from being merely figurative expressions, these idioms serve as repositories of collective knowledge, preserving information about significant places, events and cultural stereotypes across generations. Drawing on the principles of cognitive linguistics and cultural linguistics, the study investigates how place names acquire symbolic meanings and become embedded in idiomatic expressions.

Key words: toponymic idioms, collective knowledge, cultural memory, cognitive linguistics, cultural linguistics, phraseology, place names, conceptualization, collective identity, figurative language.

Introduction

Language is not only a system of communication but also a reflection of collective human experience, cultural identity and shared knowledge. Among various linguistic units that carry cultural and cognitive significance, idioms play a particularly important role because they convey meanings that go beyond the literal



interpretation of words. Idiomatic expressions are deeply embedded in the cultural and historical background of a speech community, making them valuable tools for understanding how people conceptualize the world. Within the field of phraseology, toponymic idioms represent a unique category of expressions that include geographical names such as cities, countries or regions. These idioms often develop from historical events, cultural associations or stereotypical perceptions connected to specific places. For example, expressions like “carry coals to Newcastle” or “from here to Timbuktu” illustrate how place names are used metaphorically to express ideas such as redundancy, distance or abundance. Such idioms demonstrate that geographical names are not merely references to physical locations but also carriers of symbolic and cultural meaning. The study of toponymic idioms is closely related to the concept of collective knowledge, which refers to the shared understanding, beliefs and experiences accumulated by a community over time. This collective knowledge is reflected in language and becomes encoded in idiomatic expressions. When speakers use toponymic idioms, they rely on common cultural background knowledge that allows them to interpret meanings that are not explicitly stated. Therefore, understanding these idioms requires both linguistic competence and cultural awareness. From a cognitive and cultural linguistic perspective, toponymic idioms are viewed as products of mental processes that link language, thought and cultural experience. They reveal how individuals categorize and conceptualize geographical space based on shared social memory and cultural interpretation. As a result, these idioms function as cognitive tools that help organize and transmit collective knowledge across generations.

By analyzing the relationship between place names, idiomatic meaning and shared cultural experience, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interaction between language, cognition and culture. The concept of toponymic idioms as a representation of collective knowledge has been widely discussed within cognitive linguistics, cultural linguistics, and phraseological studies. Different



scholars approach this phenomenon from slightly different perspectives, particularly in terms of how idiomatic meaning is formed and how cultural knowledge is encoded in language.

According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), idiomatic expressions are grounded in conceptual metaphors that structure human thought. From their perspective, language reflects underlying cognitive systems, and idioms emerge from systematic mappings between concrete experiences and abstract concepts. In the case of toponymic idioms, geographical names are used metaphorically to represent abstract ideas such as distance, abundance, or social reputation. Their approach emphasizes the universal cognitive mechanisms that shape idiomatic meaning, suggesting that collective knowledge is largely structured through shared conceptual systems.

In contrast, Zoltán Kövecses (2010) emphasizes the role of culture in shaping metaphorical and idiomatic meanings. He argues that although conceptual metaphor is a general cognitive mechanism, its realization is highly influenced by cultural context. According to Kövecses, toponymic idioms cannot be fully understood without considering the cultural experiences, historical events and social practices associated with specific places. Thus, collective knowledge in idioms is not only cognitive but also deeply cultural and community-specific.

Another important contribution comes from Farzad Sharifian (2011), who introduces the concept of cultural conceptualization. He explains that idioms reflect shared cultural schemas, categories and metaphors that are developed within a speech community over time. From this perspective, toponymic idioms function as cultural memory units that store and transmit collective knowledge across generations.

A comparison of these views shows both similarities and differences. Lakoff and Johnson focus on universal cognitive structures, while Kövecses and Sharifian emphasize culturally embedded meaning construction. All scholars agree, however,



that idiomatic meaning is not arbitrary but motivated by cognitive and cultural processes. The difference lies in the degree of emphasis placed on universality versus cultural specificity.

In our view, toponymic idioms as representations of collective knowledge should be understood through an integrated approach that combines both cognitive and cultural perspectives. Cognitive mechanisms such as metaphor and metonymy provide the mental framework for meaning construction, while cultural experience gives these meanings their specific content and interpretive depth. Therefore, collective knowledge in toponymic idioms emerges from the interaction between universal cognitive processes and culturally shared experience. This integrated approach offers a more comprehensive explanation of how language encodes and transmits collective knowledge within a community.

Conclusion

The analysis of toponymic idioms as representations of collective knowledge demonstrates that idiomatic meaning is a complex product of both cognitive and cultural processes. Toponymic idioms are not merely fixed expressions containing geographical names, but meaningful linguistic units that reflect the shared experiences, historical memory and cultural values of a speech community. Through these expressions, collective knowledge is encoded, preserved and transmitted across generations.

The review of scholarly perspectives shows that different researchers emphasize different aspects of this phenomenon. Lakoff and Johnson highlight the role of conceptual metaphor as a universal cognitive mechanism underlying idiomatic meaning construction. Kövecses and Sharifian, however, stress the importance of cultural context and shared cultural models in shaping how idioms are understood and interpreted. While these approaches differ in focus, they complement each other in explaining the multidimensional nature of idiomatic meaning. Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that toponymic



idioms cannot be fully explained by either purely cognitive or purely cultural approaches alone. Instead, their meaning emerges from the interaction between universal cognitive mechanisms and culture-specific knowledge systems. Cognitive processes such as metaphor and metonymy provide the structural foundation for meaning construction, while cultural experience gives idioms their specific semantic richness and interpretive depth.

Toponymic idioms serve as important linguistic tools for representing collective knowledge, reflecting how human cognition and cultural experience are deeply interconnected. Further research in this area may contribute to a more detailed understanding of how language functions as a repository of cultural memory and shared knowledge.

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