



SEMANTIC CLASSIFICATION OF ENGLISH IDIOMS

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Abstract. *Phraseological units play an important role in the vocabulary system of the English language and reflect the cultural, cognitive, and semantic richness of communication. These fixed or semi-fixed word combinations often possess figurative meanings that cannot be fully understood through the literal interpretation of their components. The present article examines the main semantic features of English phraseological units, focusing on idiomaticity, semantic transparency, figurativeness, and motivation. The study is based on theoretical approaches developed in phraseology and cognitive linguistics, including the classifications of Viktor Vinogradov and Alexander Kunin. In addition, the research considers cognitive explanations of idioms proposed by George Lakoff, which highlight the role of conceptual metaphors and metonymy in the formation of idiomatic meaning. that combines semantic complexity, expressive potential, and cultural specificity within the English language.*

Keywords: *phraseological units, English idioms, semantic features, idiomaticity, semantic transparency, figurative meaning, conceptual metaphor, cognitive linguistics, phraseology, cultural specificity*

Annotatsiya. *Frazeologik birliklar ingliz tilining lug'at tizimida muhim o'rin tutadi hamda muloqotning madaniy, kognitiv va semantik boyligini aks ettiradi. Ushbu turg'un yoki yarim turg'un so'z birikmalari ko'pincha ko'chma ma'noga ega bo'lib, ularning ma'nosini tarkibiy qismlarining bevosita ma'nosidan to'liq anglab bo'lmaydi. Mazkur maqolada ingliz tilidagi frazeologik birliklarning asosiy semantik*



xususiyatlari, xususan idiomatiklik, semantik shaffoflik, obrazlilik va motivatsiya darajasi tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot frazeologiya va kognitiv lingvistika sohasida ishlab chiqilgan nazariy yondashuvlarga asoslanadi. Jumladan, Viktor Vinogradov va Alexander Kunin tomonidan taklif qilingan tasniflar ko'rib chiqiladi. Shuningdek, tadqiqotda George Lakoff tomonidan ilgari surilgan kognitiv yondashuv ham tahlil qilinib, unda konseptual metafora va metonimiyaning idiomatik ma'no shakllanishidagi roli yoritiladi. Tahlil natijalari shuni ko'rsatadiki, frazeologik birliklar ingliz tilida semantik murakkablik, ifodaviylik hamda madaniy xoslikni o'zida mujassam etgan muhim lingvistik hodisa hisoblanadi.

Kalit so'zlar: frazeologik birliklar, idiomatiylik, semantik shaffoflik, ko'chma ma'no, konseptual metafora, frazeologiya, madaniy o'ziga xoslik.

Аннотация. Фразеологические единицы играют важную роль в лексической системе английского языка и отражают культурное, когнитивное и семантическое богатство коммуникации. Эти устойчивые или полу-устойчивые словосочетания часто обладают переносным значением, которое невозможно полностью понять через буквальное толкование их компонентов. В данной статье рассматриваются основные семантические особенности английских фразеологических единиц, включая идиоматичность, семантическую прозрачность, образность и степень мотивации. Исследование основано на теоретических подходах, разработанных в области фразеологии и когнитивной лингвистики. В частности, анализируются классификации, предложенные Viktor Vinogradov и Alexander Kunin. Кроме того, в работе учитываются когнитивные объяснения идиом, предложенные George Lakoff, которые подчеркивают роль концептуальных метафор и метонимии в формировании идиоматического значения. Результаты анализа показывают, что фразеологические единицы представляют собой значимое лингвистическое явление, объединяющее семантическую сложность, выразительный потенциал и культурную специфику английского языка.



Ключевые слова: фразеологические единицы, английские идиомы, семантические особенности, переносное значение, концептуальная метафора, когнитивная лингвистика, фразеология, культурная специфика.

Introduction. Phraseological units represent one of the most expressive and culturally rich components of the English language. These stable word combinations, often referred to as idioms, set expressions, or phrasemes, are widely used in both spoken and written communication. Unlike free word combinations, phraseological units possess a fixed structure and a figurative meaning that cannot always be interpreted through the literal meanings of their individual components. Because of this unique semantic nature, phraseological expressions have become an important subject of research in modern linguistics, particularly in the fields of lexicology, semantics, and cognitive linguistics.

The semantic characteristics of phraseological units include idiomaticity, semantic integrity, figurativeness, and varying degrees of transparency. Some idioms are completely opaque, meaning that their meanings cannot be inferred from the meanings of their constituent words. For instance, the idiom *kick the bucket* meaning “to die” has no direct connection with the literal meanings of the words *kick* and *bucket*. Other phraseological expressions, however, are partially motivated and allow speakers to guess their figurative meanings through metaphorical association, such as *spill the beans*, which means “to reveal a secret.” This variation creates a continuum of semantic transparency within English phraseology.

The theoretical study of phraseological units has a long tradition in linguistics. One of the most influential classifications was proposed by Viktor Vinogradov, who divided phraseological units into three main types: phraseological fusions, phraseological unities, and phraseological combinations, according to their degree of semantic cohesion and motivation. Later, this approach was further developed by Alexander Kunin, who focused specifically on English phraseology and introduced functional and stylistic aspects into the classification of idiomatic expressions.



In modern linguistic research, the study of idioms is also closely connected with cognitive linguistics. Scholars such as George Lakoff argue that many idiomatic expressions are motivated by conceptual metaphors and metonymic patterns that reflect human cognitive experience. According to this approach, idioms are not random linguistic phenomena but are linked to conceptual structures that shape the way people understand and describe reality.

The study of semantic features of English phraseological units is particularly relevant in the context of language teaching, translation studies, and intercultural communication. Idioms often present significant challenges for second language learners because their figurative meanings and cultural associations may not correspond to those found in the learner's native language. Therefore, analyzing the semantic nature of phraseological expressions contributes to a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed and interpreted in English.

The aim of this article is to examine the main semantic features of English phraseological units, focusing on their degree of idiomaticity, semantic transparency, figurativeness, and cognitive motivation. By analyzing these characteristics, the study seeks to demonstrate how phraseological expressions function as an important part of the lexical and cultural system of the English language.

Literature Review. The study of phraseological units has long been an important area of linguistic research, particularly in the fields of lexicology, semantics, and phraseology. Early theoretical investigations focused on defining the structural and semantic characteristics of fixed expressions and determining the degree of semantic cohesion within them. One of the most influential approaches was proposed by Viktor Vinogradov, who introduced a semantic classification of phraseological units. According to his theory, phraseological expressions can be divided into three main types: phraseological fusions, phraseological unities, and phraseological combinations, depending on the degree of semantic motivation and structural stability.



Further development of phraseological theory was carried out by Alexander Kunin, whose work focused specifically on English phraseology. Kunin expanded Vinogradov's classification and emphasized the functional, stylistic, and semantic properties of idiomatic expressions in English. His research provided a comprehensive description of phraseological units and contributed significantly to the development of English phraseology as an independent field of study.

Another important contribution to phraseological research was made by Natalia Amosova, who introduced the concept of contextual phraseology. Amosova argued that the meaning of phraseological units is closely connected with their contextual environment and proposed the principle of "minimum free context" to explain how idiomatic meanings are realized in language.

In modern linguistics, the study of idioms has increasingly incorporated cognitive approaches. Scholars such as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson demonstrated that many idiomatic expressions are motivated by conceptual metaphors and embodied experiences. Their theory suggests that idioms are not completely arbitrary but are linked to conceptual structures that shape human thought and perception. This cognitive perspective has helped explain how figurative meaning develops and why certain idioms are widely understood within particular cultural contexts.

Corpus-based studies have also contributed significantly to the analysis of phraseological units. For example, Rosamund Moon conducted extensive research on fixed expressions and idioms in English using corpus linguistics methods. Her work revealed patterns of usage, semantic prosody, and variation within phraseological units, highlighting the importance of frequency and context in understanding idiomatic language.

Recent research continues to explore phraseological units from interdisciplinary perspectives, including cognitive linguistics, translation studies, and second language acquisition. These studies emphasize that idioms play a crucial role in communication because they convey cultural knowledge, emotional expression,



and figurative meaning. As a result, the investigation of semantic features of English phraseological units remains an important topic in contemporary linguistic research.

Methodology. The present study adopts a qualitative and theoretical-descriptive research approach to analyze the semantic features of English phraseological units. The research focuses on identifying and interpreting the main semantic characteristics of idiomatic expressions, including idiomaticity, semantic transparency, figurativeness, and motivation. The analysis is based on established theories in phraseology and cognitive linguistics.

The theoretical framework of the study relies on the classification of phraseological units proposed by Viktor Vinogradov, who divided phraseological expressions into three main categories: phraseological fusions, phraseological unities, and phraseological combinations according to their degree of semantic cohesion and motivation. This approach was further developed in English phraseology by Alexander Kunin, whose work provides a detailed description of the structural and semantic properties of English idioms.

In addition, the study incorporates principles from cognitive linguistics, particularly the theory of conceptual metaphor introduced by George Lakoff. According to this approach, many idiomatic expressions are motivated by conceptual metaphors and metonymic relationships that reflect human cognitive experience and cultural knowledge.

For the purpose of analysis, a selection of commonly used English phraseological units was examined using major lexicographic sources such as the *Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* and the *Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms*. These sources provide reliable examples of idiomatic expressions and their meanings. The selected units were analyzed according to their degree of semantic transparency, figurative basis, and structural stability.

The study also applies a comparative analytical method to identify semantic patterns and the degree of motivation in different types of phraseological units. Through this approach, the research aims to demonstrate how idiomatic



expressions function semantically within the English language and how their meanings are connected with metaphorical and cultural conceptualizations.

The methodology does not involve experimental data collection; instead, it relies on the analysis of theoretical literature, lexicographic materials, and previously established linguistic classifications to provide a comprehensive understanding of the semantic nature of English phraseological units

Discussion. The analysis of English phraseological units demonstrates that their semantic structure is complex and cannot be explained solely through the literal meanings of their individual components. One of the most distinctive semantic features of phraseological expressions is idiomaticity, which refers to the degree to which the meaning of the whole expression differs from the meanings of its constituent words. In many cases, idioms exhibit a high level of semantic opacity, making them difficult to interpret without prior knowledge of their figurative meaning.

According to the classification proposed by Viktor Vinogradov, phraseological units can be analyzed based on the degree of semantic motivation. Phraseological fusions represent the most opaque type, where the meaning of the expression is completely unrelated to the literal meanings of its components. For example, the idiom *kick the bucket* meaning “to die” illustrates a phraseological fusion because its meaning cannot be deduced from the individual words. Phraseological unities, on the other hand, maintain a certain metaphorical connection between literal and figurative meanings. An example is *spill the beans*, which metaphorically refers to revealing a secret. Phraseological combinations represent the most transparent type, where one element of the phrase retains its literal meaning while the other acquires a figurative sense.

Another important semantic feature of phraseological units is figurativeness. Idiomatic expressions often rely on metaphorical and metonymic associations that allow speakers to convey complex ideas in a concise and expressive form. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, many idioms are motivated by conceptual metaphors that structure human thinking. As suggested by George Lakoff,



conceptual metaphors such as UP–DOWN orientation, container schemas, and bodily experience frequently shape the meaning of idiomatic expressions. For instance, expressions like *on cloud nine* reflect the conceptual metaphor HAPPINESS IS UP, where positive emotional states are associated with upward spatial orientation.

Cultural factors also play a significant role in the semantic interpretation of phraseological units. Idioms often reflect the historical experiences, traditions, and social practices of a particular linguistic community. As a result, many phraseological expressions contain cultural references that may not be easily understood by non-native speakers. This cultural specificity explains why idioms often present difficulties in second language learning and translation.

Furthermore, phraseological units contribute significantly to the expressiveness and stylistic richness of language. They allow speakers to communicate emotions, attitudes, and evaluations in a vivid and memorable way. In literary texts, journalism, and everyday speech, idioms enhance communicative effectiveness by providing colorful and concise descriptions of complex situations.

Overall, the discussion highlights that English phraseological units represent a multifaceted linguistic phenomenon. Their semantic characteristics involve varying degrees of idiomaticity, metaphorical motivation, and cultural embedding. Understanding these features is essential for a deeper comprehension of how figurative meaning operates in the English language and how phraseological expressions function in real communication.

Conclusion. In conclusion, phraseological units represent an essential and expressive component of the English language vocabulary. Their semantic nature reflects the interaction between literal meaning, figurative interpretation, and cultural knowledge. The analysis of English phraseological expressions shows that idiomatic meaning is often characterized by different degrees of semantic transparency, ranging from highly opaque expressions to relatively motivated combinations.

The study also demonstrates that classical phraseological theories, particularly the classifications proposed by Viktor Vinogradov and later developed



by Alexander Kunin, provide a solid foundation for understanding the semantic structure of phraseological units. These classifications help identify the degree of semantic cohesion and motivation within idiomatic expressions.

At the same time, modern cognitive linguistic approaches contribute to a deeper explanation of how idiomatic meanings are formed. The theory of conceptual metaphor introduced by George Lakoff demonstrates that many idioms are motivated by metaphorical and metonymic patterns rooted in human cognitive experience and cultural perception. This perspective shows that idioms are not entirely arbitrary but are often connected with conceptual structures that shape human thinking.

Furthermore, phraseological units play an important role in enhancing the expressive and stylistic richness of communication. They convey emotions, evaluations, and cultural meanings that cannot always be expressed through literal language. However, their figurative and culture-specific nature may create challenges for second language learners and translators.

Overall, the investigation of semantic features of English phraseological units contributes to a better understanding of figurative language and its role in communication. Future research may focus on corpus-based studies, cross-linguistic comparisons, and the role of phraseological units in language teaching and translation practice.

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