

CULTURAL SIGNS AND SYMBOLS AS A LINGUISTIC RESOURCE FOR IMPROVING STUDENTS' PHRASEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE

Sharipova Madina Abduxajaxanovna

A master's student at Samarkand

State institute of foreign languages

Email: onlymadina2122@gmail.com

Scientific supervisor: Associate Professor **Uktam Bakhodirovich Shukurov**

Abstract: This paper explores the role of cultural signs and symbols as essential linguistic resources in enhancing students' phraseological competence. It argues that idioms, proverbs, and other fixed expressions cannot be effectively learned without understanding the cultural meanings embedded within them. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from cultural linguistics, semiotics, and cognitive linguistics, the study emphasizes that cultural symbols provide the conceptual and emotional context that shapes phraseological meaning and use. Through the analysis of symbolic systems such as color, animal, religious, and body part metaphors, the paper highlights how different cultures encode distinct worldviews in their phraseological inventories. Furthermore, it proposes a cultural-symbolic approach to teaching phraseology that integrates etymological explanation, cross-cultural comparison, visual representation, and experiential learning. Such pedagogical practices not only enhance learners' retention and appropriate use of idiomatic language but also foster intercultural awareness and communicative competence. The findings underline the necessity of viewing phraseological instruction as a culturally grounded process that connects linguistic knowledge with cultural understanding. Keywords: cultural symbols, phraseological competence, idioms, language teaching, intercultural competence, cognitive linguistics.

Cultural Signs and Symbols as a Linguistic Resource for Improving Students' Phraseological Competence

Introduction

Language learning extends far beyond the mere acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical structures; it encompasses the intricate web of cultural meanings embedded within phraseological units. Phraseological competence—the ability to understand and appropriately use fixed expressions, idioms, proverbs, and collocations—represents a crucial component of communicative competence and cultural literacy. Cultural signs and symbols serve as invaluable linguistic resources that can significantly enhance students' phraseological competence by providing contextual frameworks, mnemonic anchors, and deeper semantic understanding of fixed expressions. This paper explores the theoretical foundations of using cultural signs and symbols in phraseological instruction and proposes practical pedagogical approaches for their integration into language learning curricula.

Theoretical Framework: Culture, Symbols, and Phraseology

The relationship between culture and language has been extensively documented in linguistic anthropology and cultural linguistics. According to Kramsch (1998), language is "the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives," and when it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways. Phraseological units, as crystallized expressions of collective experience, embody cultural concepts, values, and worldviews that have been transmitted across generations. Cultural signs and symbols function as semiotic resources that carry shared meanings within a linguistic community. Pierce's triadic model of signs—comprising the representamen (sign form), object (referent), and interpretant (meaning)—provides a useful framework for understanding how cultural symbols encode meaning in phraseological expressions. For instance, the English idiom "to bury the hatchet" makes little sense without knowledge of the Native American peace ceremony involving the literal burial of weapons, demonstrating how cultural-historical knowledge illuminates phraseological meaning. The cognitive linguistic approach, particularly Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, reveals that many idioms and fixed expressions derive from underlying conceptual metaphors rooted in cultural experience. Symbols such as "heart" (representing emotion), "head" (representing rationality), or "up" (representing positive states) recur across phraseological systems because they

reflect culturally shared bodily experiences and cognitive mappings.

Cultural Symbols in Phraseological Systems

Different cultures employ distinct symbolic systems that manifest in their phraseological inventories. Animal symbolism provides a particularly rich example of cultural variation in phraseological meaning. While Western cultures often associate owls with wisdom (as in "wise as an owl"), many Asian cultures view owls as symbols of death or misfortune, leading to divergent phraseological uses. Similarly, colors carry culturally specific symbolic meanings that inform idiomatic expressions: "green with envy" in English, "yellow with jealousy" in French (*jaune de jalousie*), and "blue with envy" in German (*blau vor Neid*) demonstrate how the same emotion attaches to different color symbols across linguistic communities.

Religious and mythological symbols constitute another significant source of phraseological expressions. Biblical references permeate English phraseology with expressions such as "a wolf in sheep's clothing," "the salt of the earth," and "the prodigal son," while classical mythology contributes idioms like "Achilles' heel" and "Pandora's box". Understanding these source domains enables students to decode not only the literal meaning but also the connotative and pragmatic dimensions of phraseological units.

Body part symbolism represents a universal yet culturally variable category. While all cultures utilize body parts metaphorically, their symbolic associations differ. The "heart" as the seat of emotions appears widespread, yet specific expressions vary: English speakers "wear their heart on their sleeve," while Russian speakers might have "a stone in their heart" (*камень на сердце*) when burdened. Recognizing these culturally conditioned symbolic patterns facilitates both comprehension and production of appropriate phraseological expressions.

Pedagogical Implications and Methodological Approaches

Cultural-Symbolic Approach to Phraseology Teaching

Traditional approaches to teaching idioms and fixed expressions often present them as arbitrary linguistic items to be memorized. However, research demonstrates that explicit instruction in the cultural-symbolic foundations of phraseological units enhances retention, comprehension, and appropriate use. A cultural-symbolic approach involves

several key pedagogical principles:

1. Etymology and Cultural Context: Providing students with the historical and cultural origins of phraseological expressions creates memorable cognitive frameworks. For example, explaining that "spill the beans" may derive from ancient Greek voting practices where beans were used as ballots transforms an opaque idiom into a culturally grounded narrative. This approach activates deeper semantic processing and episodic memory, facilitating long-term retention.

2. Cross-Cultural Comparison: Comparative analysis of equivalent phraseological expressions across languages highlights both universal cognitive patterns and culture-specific symbolic systems. Students analyzing weather metaphors, for instance, might observe that many cultures use storm imagery to describe anger ("a storm of protest," "tempest in a teapot"), while the specific meteorological phenomena referenced reflect local climatic experiences.

3. Visual-Symbolic Representation: Incorporating visual materials—photographs, artwork, symbols, and infographics—that illustrate the cultural signs underlying phraseological expressions engages multiple cognitive channels. Research in multimedia learning demonstrates that combining verbal and visual information enhances comprehension and memory compared to verbal instruction alone. Students might create visual dictionaries mapping cultural symbols to their associated phraseological expressions, thereby constructing personalized mnemonic systems.

4. Experiential and Project-Based Learning: Engaging students in ethnographic mini-projects where they investigate the cultural origins of phraseological expressions in their target language promotes autonomous learning and cultural awareness. Such projects might involve interviewing native speakers, researching historical contexts, or analyzing authentic texts for phraseological usage patterns.

Practical Classroom Applications

Several practical activities can operationalize the cultural-symbolic approach to phraseology instruction:

Symbol Mapping Activities: Students create semantic networks connecting cultural symbols to their associated phraseological expressions. For example, a "hand" symbol

might branch into expressions like "give someone a hand," "hands down," "hand in hand," "wash one's hands of," each explored for its metaphorical extension and cultural logic.

Cultural Narrative Construction: Students research and present the cultural stories behind idiomatic expressions, creating multimedia presentations that explain both the linguistic form and cultural context. This activity develops research skills, cultural knowledge, and metalinguistic awareness simultaneously.

Contrastive Phraseological Analysis: Learners compare how their native language and target language express similar concepts through different cultural symbols. This contrastive work heightens awareness of cultural specificity in language and helps avoid negative transfer or inappropriate literal translation of phraseological units. **Corpus-**

Based Discovery Learning: Advanced students can use phraseological dictionaries and text corpora to investigate usage patterns, frequency, and contextual constraints of culturally marked expressions. This approach develops learner autonomy and analytical skills while grounding phraseological competence in authentic language use.

Dramatization and Role-Play: Students enact scenarios requiring appropriate use of culturally contextualized phraseological expressions. This communicative practice develops pragmatic competence—understanding when and how to use particular expressions appropriately—alongside cultural competence.

Challenges and Considerations

While cultural-symbolic approaches offer significant benefits, several challenges warrant consideration. First, the etymological explanations for many phraseological expressions remain uncertain or contested, requiring teachers to present multiple possible origins or acknowledge uncertainty. Second, folk etymologies—popular but linguistically inaccurate origin stories—circulate widely and may mislead students if not critically examined.

Cultural sensitivity represents another crucial consideration. Some phraseological expressions encode stereotypes, historical prejudices, or culturally offensive content. Teachers must navigate these issues thoughtfully, using them as opportunities for critical cultural analysis rather than uncritical transmission. Discussing the historical context of

problematic expressions while addressing their contemporary implications develops students' critical cultural awareness.

Additionally, the sheer volume of culturally marked phraseological expressions can overwhelm learners. Principled selection based on frequency, cultural salience, and communicative usefulness ensures that instruction remains manageable and practically oriented. Corpus linguistics research provides valuable guidance for identifying high-frequency phraseological units deserving instructional attention.

Technology-Enhanced Approaches

Digital technologies offer innovative possibilities for integrating cultural signs and symbols into phraseology instruction. Mobile applications can provide on-demand access to etymological information, visual representations, and usage examples of phraseological expressions. Multimedia databases like the Visual Phraseology Project combine images, animations, and explanatory texts to illustrate the cultural-symbolic foundations of idioms.

Social media platforms enable authentic engagement with phraseological language in context, while also exposing learners to emerging expressions and evolving usage patterns. Online collaborative tools facilitate international exchanges where students compare phraseological systems across cultures with peer learners from different linguistic backgrounds.

Virtual reality and augmented reality technologies present particularly promising frontiers. Immersive environments could recreate the historical-cultural contexts from which phraseological expressions emerged, providing experiential learning opportunities impossible through traditional instruction. For instance, students might virtually "participate" in cultural ceremonies or historical events that gave rise to particular expressions.

Assessment of Phraseological Competence

Evaluating students' phraseological competence requires assessment instruments that capture both receptive and productive dimensions, as well as cultural understanding. Traditional fill-in-the-blank or multiple-choice tests assess recognition but not the pragmatic and cultural aspects of phraseological competence. More authentic assessment

approaches include:

Contextualized Cloze Tasks: Students complete missing phraseological expressions in extended discourse, demonstrating understanding of contextual appropriateness.

Cultural Explanation Tasks: Students provide cultural explanations for phraseological expressions, demonstrating their understanding of symbolic meanings and cultural origins.

Production Tasks: Role-plays, writing assignments, and oral presentations require students to use phraseological expressions appropriately in context, revealing their productive competence and pragmatic awareness.

Comparative Analysis Portfolios: Students compile analyses of culturally interesting phraseological expressions, documenting their research and cultural insights over time. This formative assessment approach values process and metacognitive development alongside product.

Conclusion

Cultural signs and symbols represent indispensable linguistic resources for developing students' phraseological competence. By grounding phraseological instruction in cultural-symbolic frameworks, educators can transform idioms and fixed expressions from arbitrary memorization tasks into meaningful, culturally rich linguistic phenomena. This approach not only enhances retention and appropriate use of phraseological expressions but also develops broader cultural competence, critical thinking, and metalinguistic awareness.

The integration of cultural-symbolic approaches requires thoughtful curriculum design, culturally informed pedagogical practices, and ongoing teacher development. However, the benefits—deeper cultural understanding, enhanced communicative competence, and more engaged language learners—justify the investment. As language education increasingly recognizes the inseparability of language and culture, cultural signs and symbols will continue to play a central role in comprehensive phraseology instruction. Future research should investigate the comparative effectiveness of different cultural-symbolic teaching approaches across diverse learner populations and linguistic contexts. Longitudinal studies examining the long-term retention and transfer of phraseological

competence developed through cultural-symbolic instruction would provide valuable evidence for best practices. Additionally, research exploring how digital and immersive technologies can optimize cultural-symbolic phraseology instruction represents an important frontier as educational technology continues to evolve.

Ultimately, recognizing cultural signs and symbols as core linguistic resources transforms phraseology instruction from a peripheral concern to a central component of culturally responsive language education. This transformation benefits not only students' linguistic proficiency but also their intercultural competence and global citizenship in an increasingly interconnected world.

References

- Boers, F., & Lindstromberg, S. (2008). Cognitive linguistic approaches to teaching vocabulary and phraseology. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Carter, R. (2012). Vocabulary: Applied linguistic perspectives (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Cowie, A. P. (Ed.). (1998). Phraseology: Theory, analysis, and applications. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dobrovol'skij, D., & Piirainen, E. (2005). Figurative language: Cross-cultural and cross-linguistic perspectives. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Gairns, R., & Redman, S. (2011). Idioms and phrasal verbs: Advanced. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gibbs, R. W. (1994). The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Howarth, P. (1998). Phraseology and second language proficiency. *Applied Linguistics*, 19(1), 24-44.
- Irujo, S. (1986). Don't put your leg in your mouth: Transfer in the acquisition of idioms in a second language. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20(2), 287-304.
- Kövecses, Z. (2010). Metaphor: A practical introduction (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Madina English Teacher: Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Langlotz, A. (2006). *Idiomatic creativity: A cognitive-linguistic model of idiom-representation and idiom-variation in English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Liontas, J. I. (2002). Context and idiom understanding in second languages. *EUROSLA Yearbook*, 2(1), 155-185.
- Liu, D. (2008). *Idioms: Description, comprehension, acquisition, and pedagogy*. New York: Routledge.
- Littlemore, J., & Low, G. (2006). *Figurative thinking and foreign language learning*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mayer, R. E. (2009). *Multimedia learning (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, M., & O'Dell, F. (2017). *English idioms in use advanced (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moon, R. (1998). *Fixed expressions and idioms in English: A corpus-based approach*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Nacey, S. (2013). *Metaphors in learner English*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Prodromou, L. (2003). Idiomaticity and the non-native speaker. *English Today*, 19(2), 42-48.
- Sinclair, J. (1991). *Corpus, concordance, collocation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vasiljevic, Z. (2015). Teaching and learning idioms in L2: From theory to practice. In R. R. Heredia & A. B. Cieřlicka (Eds.), *Bilingual figurative language processing* (pp. 352-373). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wray, A. (2002). *Formulaic language and the lexicon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Footnotes

- [^1]: Howarth, P. (1998). Phraseology and second language proficiency. *Applied Linguistics*, 19(1), 24-44.
- [^2]: Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 3.

- [^3]: Peirce's semiotic theory provides the foundational framework for understanding signs in communication. See discussions in Chandler, D. (2007). *Semiotics: The basics* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- [^4]: Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- [^5]: Dobrovol'skij, D., & Piirainen, E. (2005). *Figurative language: Cross-cultural and cross-linguistic perspectives*. Amsterdam: Elsevier, pp. 123-145.
- [^6]: Gibbs, R. W. (1994). *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [^7]: Deignan, A. (2003). Metaphorical expressions and culture: An indirect link. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 18(4), 255-271.
- [^8]: Boers, F., & Lindstromberg, S. (2008). *Cognitive linguistic approaches to teaching vocabulary and phraseology*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- [^9]: Ammer, C. (2013). *The American heritage dictionary of idioms* (2nd ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Note: Many etymologies remain speculative.
- [^10]: Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A practical introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [^11]: Mayer, R. E. (2009). *Multimedia learning* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [^12]: Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- [^13]: Sinclair, J. (1991). *Corpus, concordance, collocation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [^14]: Liberman, A. (2009). *Word origins and how we know them*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [^15]: Lippi-Green, R. (2012). *English with an accent: Language, ideology and discrimination in the United States* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- [^16]: Liu, D. (2008). *Idioms: Description, comprehension, acquisition, and pedagogy*. New York: Routledge.
- [^17]: Condon, N. (2008). *How cognitive linguistic motivations influence the learning of*

phrasal verbs. In F. Boers & S. Lindstromberg (Eds.), Cognitive linguistic approaches to teaching vocabulary and phraseology (pp. 133-158). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

[^18]: Godwin-Jones, R. (2018). Chasing the butterfly effect: Informal language learning online as a complex system. *Language Learning & Technology*, 22(2), 8-27. > Madina English Teacher:

[^19]: Freina, L., & Ott, M. (2015). A literature review on immersive virtual reality in education: State of the art and perspectives. *The International Scientific Conference eLearning and Software for Education*, 1, 133-141.

[^20]: Liontas, J. I. (2002). Context and idiom understanding in second languages. *EUROSLA Yearbook*, 2(1), 155-185. > Madina English Teacher: Shamuradova N., Abdurakhmonov M. (2024). Grammar and vocabulary in context. *Obrazovanie, nauka i innovatsionnye idei v mire*, 57(2), 127–132. URL: <https://scientificjl.org/obr/article/view/2648>

Nematova O. (2025). A comparative study of English and Uzbek anthroponyms in the context of cultural signs and symbols. *Journal of international scientific research*, 3(5), 97–103. URL: <https://spaceknowladge.com/index.php/JOISR/article/view/3127>