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THE CONCEPT OF PHRASEOLOGISM AND SOMATIC PHRASEOLOGISMS IN MODERN LINGUISTICS

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Abstract. This article examines the multifaceted concept of phraseologism and provides comprehensive analysis of somatic phraseologisms in contemporary linguistic scholarship. Phraseologisms, fixed expressions with non-compositional meanings, have become integral to understanding language structure and pragmatic use. Somatic phraseologisms, a specialized subset containing references to body parts, offer particularly rich material for cross-linguistic comparison and cultural interpretation. The paper reviews definitional frameworks, explores theoretical approaches from generative and cognitive linguistics perspectives, and analyzes examples from multiple languages including English, Russian, Uzbek, and Karakalpak. Through systematic examination of phraseological units, this study demonstrates the complex interplay between linguistic form, semantic content, and cultural significance in phraseological expressions, revealing universal cognitive patterns alongside culture-specific linguistic manifestations.

Keywords: phraseologism, phraseological units, somatic phraseologisms, non-compositionality, cognitive linguistics, cross-linguistic analysis, body-part expressions, idioms, metaphorical meaning, linguistic semantics

1. Introduction

The study of phraseology has emerged as one of the most vibrant and theoretically productive domains in contemporary linguistics, representing a critical area for understanding how language users create, comprehend, and deploy complex linguistic expressions. Phraseologisms, or phraseological units (PUs), constitute some of the most intriguing phenomena in linguistic research, occupying a distinctive intermediate position between individual lexical items and larger syntactic constructions. Unlike simple concatenations of words governed by transparent compositional principles, phraseological expressions demonstrate semantic and syntactic characteristics that transcend their component parts, rendering them indispensable objects of inquiry for linguists working across multiple theoretical frameworks and linguistic subdisciplines.

Within the broader domain of phraseological research, somatic phraseologisms-expressions incorporating explicit or metaphorical references to human body parts-occupy a particularly significant and culturally rich position. These expressions manifest remarkable cultural specificity and striking cross-linguistic variation, revealing how different linguistic communities conceptualize embodied human experience and translate bodily sensations and bodily processes into metaphorical and idiomatic language. The investigation of somatic phraseologisms provides invaluable insights into the intricate cognitive, cultural, and linguistic processes through which distinct communities construct meaning systems and transmit cultural knowledge through the medium of language.

The present article aims to provide a comprehensive and systematic examination of phraseologism as both a theoretical linguistic concept and a practical phenomenon observable in language use. Particular attention is directed toward the characteristics, functions, cognitive foundations, and cultural significance of somatic phraseologisms. The article proceeds through structured analysis of theoretical definitions, examination of contemporary linguistic frameworks, investigation of linguistic properties distinguishing phraseologisms from other expressions, and

detailed analysis of cross-linguistic examples drawn from English, Russian, Uzbek, and other languages, concluding with implications for advanced linguistic research and language pedagogy.

2. Definition and conceptualization of phraseologism

Terminological foundations

The term 'phraseologism' derives from classical Greek etymological roots: 'phrasis,' denoting expression or utterance, combined with 'logos,' signifying knowledge or systematic study. Contemporary phraseology, therefore, refers to the scientific and systematic study of set phrases, fixed expressions, and formulaic sequences within natural languages. Modern linguistic scholarship employs a diverse and sometimes overlapping terminological apparatus to designate phraseological phenomena, including established terms such as 'phraseological units' (PUs), 'idioms,' 'fixed expressions,' 'multi-word expressions' (MWEs), 'formulaic sequences,' and 'prefabricated language.' Each of these terminological choices carries specific theoretical implications and reflects distinct scholarly traditions, research priorities, and theoretical orientations within contemporary linguistics.

A fundamental and defining characteristic of phraseologisms involves the principle of non-compositionality-the linguistic property that the semantic meaning of the entire phraseological expression cannot be adequately predicted or derived from the component meanings of its individual constituent parts. For illustrative purposes, consider the English phraseological expression 'kick the bucket.' Literal interpretation of this phrase would suggest physical action directed toward a bucket; however, the conventionalized meaning of this phrase idiomatically signifies death or the end of life. This semantic opacity and the divergence between literal and figurative meanings distinguish phraseologisms from transparent compound words and regular syntactic constructions, rendering them objects of particular theoretical interest to linguists investigating the processes through which language users construct and interpret meaning.

Characteristic properties of phraseological units

Contemporary phraseological research has identified and systematized several defining and characteristic properties that distinguish phraseological units from other categories of linguistic phenomena. These properties, which often display gradient rather than binary distributions, include the following foundational features:

Fixedness and Structural Stability: Phraseologisms exhibit varying degrees of structural fixedness, wherein constituent elements demonstrate reduced flexibility with respect to rearrangement, substitution, or modification. The expression 'fixed expression' itself exemplifies this principle; native speakers of English would not naturally or idiomatically produce alternative word orderings such as 'expression fixed' or substitute constituent elements with apparent synonyms in the same manner as would be possible in transparently compositional expressions.

Semantic opacity and conventionalized meaning: The meanings of phraseological units cannot ordinarily be derived through application of standard compositional semantic principles, which would predict that phrase meaning derives from word meanings combined through regular syntactic operations. Rather, phraseologisms possess conventionalized, institutionalized meanings often grounded in historical, metaphorical, or culturally-specific processes. These conventionalized meanings are transmitted across generations within language communities through established social and linguistic practices.

Institutionalization and Social Recognition: Phraseologisms constitute recognizable, established social conventions within speech communities. Native speakers understand and utilize phraseological expressions as coherent linguistic units, frequently without conscious metacognitive awareness of their etymological origins, historical development, or the metaphorical processes through which their meanings were originally constructed.

3. Somatic phraseologisms: definition and characteristics

Somatic phraseologisms constitute a distinct, culturally significant, and linguistically productive subset of phraseological units. These expressions are distinguished by their incorporation of explicit lexical elements denoting human body parts, bodily organs, or bodily processes. The term 'somatic' derives from ancient Greek 'soma,' meaning body or corporeal form, and thus somatic phraseologisms represent a specialized category of expressions whose semantic content and metaphorical structures become anchored in and organized around concepts of human embodiment, bodily sensation, and physical experience.

Somatic phraseologisms reveal profound and often surprising cognitive processes through which speakers and language communities conceptualize abstract internal emotional states, interpersonal relationships, cognitive processes, and complex social phenomena through structured mappings from more concrete bodily experiences. The embodied experience of physical sensation and bodily processes provides the foundational cognitive substrate through which linguistic communities construct abstract and non-physical concepts through systematic metaphorical processes.

Cross-linguistic investigation of somatic phraseologisms reveals striking patterns demonstrating both profound universality and remarkable cultural particularity. While many languages employ metaphorical mappings from bodily experiences to emotional and abstract domains-appearing to reflect fundamental properties of human cognition rooted in embodied experience-the particular body parts selected for phraseological elaboration and the specific expressions generated demonstrate considerable linguistic and cultural variation. This phenomenon provides compelling evidence for the dynamic interaction of universal cognitive processes grounded in human embodiment with culturally-specific and historically-contingent processes of conventionalization in phraseological domains.

Cognitive and metaphorical foundations

Cognitive linguistics, particularly the theoretical framework of conceptual metaphor theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson, provides particularly illuminating and productive frameworks for understanding somatic phraseologisms. According to this influential theoretical approach, human cognition fundamentally relies upon systematic metaphorical mappings through which abstract conceptual domains become structured, understood, and elaborated via more concrete and directly experientially-grounded conceptual domains. Embodied human experience-sensation, movement, physical interaction with the material world-provides the foundational cognitive substrate through which speakers comprehend, reason about, and linguistically express non-physical domains including emotions, cognition, intellectual processes, and complex social relationships.

Somatic phraseologisms exemplify this fundamental metaphorical cognitive process at the phraseological level. Expressions utilizing the lexical element 'heart' frequently employ heart metaphors to represent and encode the seat of emotions, affective experience, and emotional commitment. Similarly, the lexical element 'head' frequently functions to index cognitive processes, rational thinking, and intellectual capacity. The lexical element 'hand' regularly signifies human agency, intentional control, and instrumental action. These metaphorical mappings, while demonstrating certain universal tendencies grounded in shared human physiology and sensorimotor experience, also reveal sophisticated culture-specific elaborations and extended applications that reflect particular historical developments, social conditions, and environmental contexts specific to individual linguistic communities.

3.2 Examples and cross-linguistic comparison

The following illustrative examples demonstrate the remarkable diversity and underlying organizational patterns evident in somatic phraseological expressions across multiple languages and linguistic communities:

Heart-related expressions: English expressions include 'have a heart' (demonstrate compassion toward another person), 'break someone's heart' (cause profound emotional pain), 'cross my heart' (communicate sincerity and truthfulness). Russian phraseological expressions include 'сердце не на месте' (heart not in proper place – express anxiety or disturbance), 'от всего сердца' (from complete heart – indicate genuineness of feeling). These expressions across multiple languages demonstrate the remarkable universal conceptualization of the heart as the metaphorical locus of emotional experience and affective commitment.

Head-related expressions: English examples include 'lose one's head' (become emotionally uncontrolled or irrational), 'use your head' (engage in rational thinking), 'head over heels' (completely immersed or absorbed). Uzbek examples include 'boshiga o'tmoq' (go to head – achieve distinction), 'boshi xom' (raw head – person lacking maturity). These expressions map bodily spatial orientation and head location onto emotional and cognitive states.

Hand-related expressions: English examples include 'lend a hand' (provide instrumental assistance), 'hand in hand' (proceed together in cooperation), 'get one's hands on' (obtain possession of something desired). These expressions consistently associate the hand with human agency, control, and intentional instrumental action.

4. Classification systems for phraseological units

Linguistic scholarship has proposed and developed multiple competing classification systems and categorical frameworks for phraseological units, each reflecting distinct theoretical priorities, research objectives, and epistemological assumptions. Traditional classification approaches distinguished among several fundamental categories: idioms (characterized by complete or near-complete non-compositionality), colloquial or semi-idiomatic expressions (displaying partial compositionality), and proverbs (complete thoughts encoding cultural wisdom or moral principles). Contemporary classification systems developed within modern theoretical linguistics emphasize gradient and continuous properties, recognizing that compositionality and fixedness represent continuous variables subject to degree and nuance rather than discrete, binary categorical distinctions.

Distinguished scholars in phraseological research distinguish among 'phraseological fusions' (demonstrating complete semantic opacity with no transparent relationship between component meaning and overall phraseological meaning), 'phraseological unities' (where underlying metaphorical motivation maintains some degree of semantic transparency and interpretability), and 'phraseological combinations' (expressions containing one component with specialized or idiomatic usage combined with transparent components). This tripartite framework acknowledges and systematizes the gradient spectrum of compositionality rather than treating phraseological units as an undifferentiated category.

5. Functions and sociolinguistic dimensions

Beyond their structural properties and semantic characteristics, phraseological units function within broader communicative contexts and serve multiple functions within language use and discourse. Phraseologisms frequently carry significant stylistic connotations and markers, functioning to mark discourse as formally elevated, colloquial, archaic, regionally specific, or specialized within particular professional or technical communities. Somatic phraseologisms, in particular, frequently carry strong emotional resonance and affective loading, functioning to establish emotional rapport and connection between speakers and listeners through invocation of shared cultural knowledge and embodied human experience.

The strategic deployment and use of phraseological expressions indexes and communicates speaker identity, group membership, and cultural affiliation within broader social structures. Demonstrated mastery of phraseological repertoires and ability to deploy phraseological expressions appropriately constitutes a critical distinction between native speakers and non-native speakers of a language, functioning as a crucial dimension of pragmatic and communicative competence. Contemporary research in second language acquisition has increasingly recognized phraseological proficiency as a distinct and important dimension of overall language competence, separate and distinguishable from grammatical competence and lexical knowledge.

6. Contemporary linguistic research on phraseologisms

Modern linguistic research on phraseologisms and phraseological phenomena operates across multiple complementary and mutually informing theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches. Corpus-based approaches employing large electronic text collections enable systematic, data-driven investigation of phraseological frequency distributions, variation patterns, and contextual usage patterns across large text collections. Cognitive linguistic approaches emphasize the underlying metaphorical and metonymic conceptual foundations of phraseological meaning systems. Psycholinguistic research investigates the cognitive and mental processes through which language users comprehend, interpret, and produce phraseological expressions in real-time language processing. Computational and natural language processing approaches develop sophisticated algorithms for automatic phraseological unit identification, classification, and semantic interpretation.

Research attention has increasingly focused upon pedagogical applications and implications of phraseological research for language teaching and learning. Language educators and applied linguists increasingly recognize and appreciate that explicit, targeted instruction in phraseological expressions and phraseological competence significantly enhances learner proficiency, fluency, and native-like production. Moreover, contrastive phraseological analysis examining similarities and differences in phraseological systems across different languages illuminates cross-linguistic differences and facilitates development of strategies for addressing challenges in multilingual language learning contexts.

7. Conclusion

Phraseologisms represent complex and multifaceted linguistic phenomena that transcend and exceed the boundaries of traditional word-level and sentence-level linguistic analyses. Their rigorous investigation requires sophisticated theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches capable of capturing the intricate interplay among conventionalization processes, underlying cognitive processes, semantic opacity and metaphorical grounding, and cultural significance. Somatic phraseologisms, with their rich and multifaceted grounding in embodied human experience and their remarkable and striking cross-linguistic variation, exemplify and demonstrate both the universal cognitive foundations of linguistic meaning-making processes and the culture-specific and historically-contingent elaborations through which particular linguistic communities conceptualize, express, and transmit human experience across generations.

Continued development and advancement of phraseological research promises significant and substantial contributions to multiple linguistic subdisciplines, including cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, psycholinguistics, second language acquisition research, and lexicography. Moreover, enhanced understanding of phraseological units and their properties contributes to increasingly sophisticated and nuanced models of human linguistic competence and communicative ability. As contemporary linguistic research continues to advance and evolve, phraseologisms and somatic expressions will undoubtedly remain central to understanding how language users create, comprehend, and deploy the complex and subtle linguistic resources

through which human societies construct shared meaning systems and transmit accumulated cultural knowledge and wisdom across generations and throughout historical time.

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