THE LINGUISTIC NATURE, CLASSIFICATION, AND FUNCTIONS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

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Abstract

Phraseological units constitute a central component of linguistic competence and play a crucial role in enhancing expressiveness, economy, and stylistic effectiveness in discourse. This article examines the linguistic nature, classification, and primary functions of phraseological units in English. Drawing on established theoretical approaches, phraseological units are analyzed as semi-fixed lexical constructions whose meanings cannot be fully derived from their individual components. Particular attention is paid to criteria such as stability, non-compositionality, and conventionality, which distinguish phraseological units from free word combinations. The study proceeds from general theoretical definitions to more specific classifications, demonstrating the significance of phraseological units in both spoken and written language.

Keywords: phraseological units, idioms, non-compositionality, stability, lexical semantics

Introduction: The Power of Phraseological Units in Language

Phraseological units represent a potent linguistic phenomenon with considerable relevance for language users. They contribute substantially to the

expressiveness and richness of any language by enabling speakers and writers to convey meaning in a concise, vivid, and memorable manner. Unlike simple syntactic constructions, phraseological units encapsulate complex meanings within relatively fixed forms, thereby engaging the audience more effectively.

From a communicative perspective, phraseological units serve as an efficient means of condensing information. Considering that the average individual speaks at a rate of approximately 110–150 words per minute, linguistic economy becomes essential. Phraseological units facilitate the transmission of large quantities of information within limited temporal and cognitive constraints. Moreover, the appropriate use of phraseological units often creates an impression of linguistic competence and stylistic sophistication, allowing discourse to stand out in both academic and everyday contexts.

Phraseological units (PUs) may be defined as *form–meaning wholes* that exceed the semantic sum of their constituent lexemes because they possess an autonomous meaning (Antonivska, 2017). More formally, they constitute a class of semi-fixed collocations whose meanings cannot be fully computed from the meanings of their individual components taken together (N. & B., 2016). Common examples in English include *by and large*, *up in the air*, and *the powers that be*. In such expressions, the literal meanings of the individual words do not straightforwardly predict the overall meaning of the unit.

DEFINING PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS: BEYOND LEXICAL ITEMS

Phraseological units such as idioms, proverbs, and set expressions play a pivotal role in linguistic systems. By encapsulating complex thoughts and emotions within cohesive structures, they enhance communicative efficiency, stylistic variation, and persuasive force (Sánchez López, 2015). Nevertheless, the distinction between a lexeme and a phraseological unit is not always immediately apparent, which has led to

extensive theoretical debate. A lexeme is generally understood as a single vocabulary item with one or more related meanings encoded at the lexical level of a language. For example, the verb *doodle* may refer to aimless drawing, daydreaming, or informal creative activity. Despite this semantic variation, *doodle* remains a lexeme because its meanings are associated with a single lexical form. In contrast, a phraseological unit represents a multi-word lexical item whose meaning diverges from the literal interpretation of its components and is stored as a unit in the mental lexicon.

In phraseology, the concept of *unithood* is central. Established criteria for identifying phraseological units include stability of form, reproducibility, semantic cohesion, and shared interpretation within a speech community. Among these criteria, non-compositionality is particularly significant: the meaning of a phraseological unit cannot be derived by simply combining the meanings of its constituents. Additional features often include figurativeness, restricted variability, and a high degree of conventionalization.

CLASSIFICATION AND LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

Phraseological units may be classified according to several parameters, including semantic transparency, structural stability, and functional usage. On the basis of semantic criteria, scholars commonly distinguish between fully idiomatic units, partially idiomatic units, and non-idiomatic fixed expressions. Fully idiomatic units exhibit complete semantic opacity, whereas partially idiomatic units retain some connection to the literal meanings of their components. Structural stability constitutes another important dimension of classification. While some phraseological units allow limited lexical or grammatical variation, others are entirely fixed. Frequency of occurrence and automaticity in speech further contribute to their identification as

phraseological units. These characteristics underscore the dual nature of phraseological units as both linguistic constructs and culturally embedded phenomena.

CONCLUSION

Phraseological units occupy a distinctive position within the lexical system of a language. Their semantic unity, relative structural stability, and conventionalized usage distinguish them from free word combinations and individual lexemes. By condensing meaning and enhancing expressiveness, phraseological units perform essential communicative and stylistic functions. A comprehensive understanding of their nature and classification not only enriches linguistic theory but also has practical implications for language teaching, translation, and discourse analysis.

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