

NATIVE PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This article examines the nature, structure, classification, and functional significance of native phraseological units in the English language. Phraseological units, often referred to as idioms or fixed expressions, represent a crucial component of linguistic competence and cultural identity. The study explores theoretical approaches proposed by prominent linguists such as Vinogradov, Koonin, Amosova, and Smirnitsky, highlighting their classifications and interpretations. Special attention is given to the semantic, structural, and pragmatic characteristics of native English phraseological units, as well as their cultural specificity. The article also provides illustrative examples to demonstrate how such units function in discourse. The research emphasizes the importance of phraseological units in enriching language, conveying figurative meanings, and reflecting national mentality.

Keywords: Phraseological units, idioms, native English expressions, fixed phrases, semantic opacity, linguistic stability, Vinogradov classification, Koonin theory, figurative language, phraseology.

Introduction

Phraseology is one of the most expressive and culturally rich layers of any language. In English, phraseological units—commonly known as idioms, set expressions, or fixed combinations—play a vital role in both spoken and written communication. These linguistic units are characterized by stability, reproducibility, and idiomatic meaning, often conveying ideas that cannot be understood from the literal meanings of their components.

Phraseological units are not merely decorative elements of language; they serve as carriers of historical experience, cultural values, and national identity. As noted in linguistic research, they are “stable word combinations that have specialized or metaphorical meanings not predictable from their components” .

The study of phraseological units has attracted the attention of many scholars across different linguistic traditions. Native phraseological units, in particular, reflect the originality of English culture and its historical development. This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of native phraseological units, their classifications, theoretical interpretations, and practical usage.

In modern linguistics, phraseological units are defined as fixed combinations of words functioning as single semantic units. According to A.V. Koonin, phraseological units are “stable word-groups with partially or fully transferred meanings” .



Similarly, V.V. Vinogradov emphasizes that in phraseological units, individual words lose their independent meanings and form a unified semantic whole .

Other scholars provide additional perspectives:

- **N.N. Amosova** defines phraseological units as fixed-context units whose components cannot be replaced without altering meaning .

- **I.V. Arnold** considers them expressive and emotionally colored expressions .**A.I. Smirnitsky** focuses on their structural and semantic integrity.

Despite differences, most linguists agree on three main features:

1. **Stability** – they are reproduced as ready-made expressions.
2. **Idiomacity** – their meaning is often figurative.
3. **Integrity** – they function as a single unit in speech.

Phraseological units differ from free word combinations because they cannot be created spontaneously; instead, they exist in the language as fixed expressions stored in memory .

Native phraseological units are those that originated within the English language itself, reflecting its historical, cultural, and social development. Unlike borrowed phraseological units, which come from other languages (e.g., Latin or French), native units are deeply rooted in English traditions, folklore, and everyday life.

Examples of native English phraseological units include:

- “*to spill the beans*” (to reveal a secret)
- “*a storm in a teacup*” (a small problem exaggerated)
- “*as busy as a bee*” (very busy)

These expressions often derive from:

- Everyday life (agriculture, crafts, household activities)
- Nature and animals
- Historical events and customs

Native phraseological units are particularly important because they reflect the worldview and mentality of English-speaking people. As noted in linguistic studies, phraseological units are closely linked to “cultural values, traditions, and ways of life” .

One of the most influential classifications was proposed by V.V. Vinogradov, who divided phraseological units into three types based on semantic transparency:

These are completely non-motivated expressions whose meanings cannot be deduced from their components.

Examples:

- “*kick the bucket*” – to die
- “*red herring*” – a distraction

These units show the highest degree of semantic opacity .

These have figurative meanings that can be partially understood through metaphor.

Examples:

- “*to add fuel to the fire*”
- “*to break the ice*”

These are partially motivated expressions where one component retains its literal meaning.



Examples:

- “to make a decision”
- “to take responsibility”

A.V. Koonin proposed a classification based on structural and functional features:

- **Nominative units** – name objects or phenomena
- **Communicative units** – express complete thoughts (e.g., proverbs)
- **Interjectional units** – express emotions

Examples:

- “well and good” (nominative)
- “actions speak louder than words” (communicative)

Phraseological units can also be classified structurally:

- **Verbal units** – “to lose one’s head”
- **Nominal units** – “a fish out of water”
- **Adjectival units** – “as cool as a cucumber”
- **Adverbial units** – “by and large”

From a functional perspective, phraseological units include:

- **Idioms**
- **Proverbs and sayings**
- **Collocations**
- **Set expressions**

Each type serves a different communicative purpose, from expressing emotions to conveying moral lessons.

Idiomaticity

The most important feature of phraseological units is idiomaticity—their meaning is not predictable from individual words.

Example:

- “spill the beans” ≠ literal spilling

Figurative Meaning

Phraseological units often rely on metaphor and symbolism.

Example:

- “a wolf in sheep’s clothing”

Semantic Integrity

All components contribute to a unified meaning.

Cultural Markedness

Phraseological units reflect national culture.

For instance, English idioms often emphasize individualism and emotional expression, while other languages may focus on collectivism.

Everyday Communication

Used frequently in informal speech:

- “hit the nail on the head”



Literature

Writers use them to create imagery and expressiveness.

Journalism

Used in headlines to attract attention.

Academic Writing

Used cautiously, mostly in formal collocations.

Phraseological units are closely tied to culture and history. Many native English idioms originate from:

- Agriculture (“*make hay while the sun shines*”)
- Seafaring (“*learn the ropes*”)
- Hunting (“*a sitting duck*”)

These expressions reflect the historical lifestyle of English society.

Native phraseological units are an essential component of the English language, reflecting its cultural heritage, historical development, and cognitive patterns. They enrich communication, enhance expressiveness, and provide insight into the worldview of English-speaking people.

The study of phraseological units remains a dynamic field, with ongoing debates regarding their classification, definition, and interpretation. Nevertheless, their importance in linguistics, language teaching, and intercultural communication cannot be overstated.

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