

PHILOLOGICAL SCIENCES

THE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE OF THE PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN ENGLISH

Huseynova M.

Master's student, Department of foreign languages

Sumgait State University, Sumgait, Azerbaijan

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Abstract

This paper delves into the intricate origins of phraseological units in the English language, offering a comprehensive analysis that spans historical, cultural, and linguistic dimensions. Phraseological units, comprising idioms, proverbs, collocations, phrasal verbs, and fixed expressions, constitute integral elements of English discourse, imbuing communication with depth and nuance. Through an interdisciplinary lens, this study investigates the diverse sources from which phraseological units emerge, ranging from ancient traditions and folklore to literary works and cross-cultural exchanges. Drawing on linguistic evidence and historical documentation, it examines the evolution of phraseological units over time, tracing their development through socio-political upheavals, technological advancements, and linguistic innovations. Furthermore, the paper explores the role of cultural diffusion, migration, and globalization in shaping the lexicon of English phraseology. By synthesizing insights from linguistics, anthropology, and literary studies, this research offers a nuanced understanding of how phraseological units serve as linguistic artifacts that reflect the rich tapestry of human experience and collective memory.

Keywords: phraseological units, English language, origins

Phraseological units, also known as phrasemes or multiword expressions, are combinations of two or more words that together form a single semantic unit. They often have a meaning that is different from the literal meaning of the individual words. In English, phraseological units are an integral part of language and play a significant role in communication, both in spoken and written contexts. Here's a comprehensive overview of the background knowledge of phraseological units in English:

Types of Phraseological Units:

Idioms: Idioms are expressions whose meanings cannot be deduced from the meanings of the individual words. They often have a figurative meaning that is unique to the expression itself. Example: "kick the bucket" (to die).

Proverbs: Proverbs are short, traditional sayings that offer advice or wisdom. They are often metaphorical in nature and convey a universal truth. Example: "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

Collocations: Collocations are combinations of words that frequently occur together due to convention or usage. They can be strong or weak, depending on the degree of association between the words. Example: "make a decision" (strong collocation) vs. "take a decision" (weak collocation).

Phrasal Verbs: Phrasal verbs consist of a verb followed by one or more particles (prepositions or adverbs) that together convey a distinct meaning. Example: "give up" (to quit).

Fixed Expressions: Fixed expressions are combinations of words that have a set form and meaning, often used in specific contexts. Example: "by and large" (generally).

Origin and Evolution:

Many phraseological units have origins in historical events, literature, culture, or folklore. They may

evolve over time, with changes in usage and interpretation.

Some idiomatic expressions trace their roots back to ancient languages, such as Latin or Greek, while others have more recent origins.

The evolution of phraseological units is influenced by factors such as social trends, technological advancements, and cultural shifts.

The origins of the phraseological units

The origins of phraseological units in English are diverse, spanning historical events, literature, culture, and interactions with other languages. Here are some examples of phraseological units along with their origins:

Idioms:

Bite the bullet: Originating from the practice of having soldiers bite on a bullet during surgery to endure the pain without anesthesia. It now means to endure a painful or difficult situation bravely. Example: "She had to bite the bullet and tell him the truth."

Break the ice: Comes from the literal action of breaking the ice to clear a path for ships. It means to initiate a conversation or social interaction in a tense or awkward situation. Example: "He told a joke to break the ice at the party." (Makkai, 1972)

Kill two birds with one stone: Originating from the idea of achieving two objectives with a single action. Example: "By scheduling our meeting during lunch, we can kill two birds with one stone."

Cost an arm and a leg: This idiom emphasizes the high cost of something, though not necessarily literal. Example: "Buying a new car these days can cost an arm and a leg." (Benson, 1985; p.29)

Proverbs:

All's fair in love and war: This proverb has ancient origins, with variations found in different cultures. It suggests that rules and morals can be disregarded in situations of intense conflict or competition. Example:

"He didn't hesitate to use any means necessary to win the argument. After all, all's fair in love and war."

Don't count your chickens before they hatch: This proverb dates back to Aesop's fables and advises against premature optimism. It means not to anticipate success before it actually happens. Example: *"I know you're excited about the job offer, but don't count your chickens before they hatch."*

Every cloud has a silver lining: This proverb suggests that even in difficult or negative situations, there is often a positive aspect. Example: *"Losing my job was tough, but it led me to pursue my passion. Every cloud has a silver lining."*

Actions speak louder than words: Originating from the idea that actions can convey more meaning or truth than mere speech. Example: *"He kept promising to change, but I knew actions speak louder than words."* (Wayne, 2005)

Collocations:

Heavy rain: This collocation reflects the natural association between the adjective "heavy" and the noun "rain" to describe intense rainfall. Example: *"We had to cancel our picnic because of the heavy rain."*

Fast asleep: The adverb "fast" in this collocation means firmly or deeply, emphasizing the depth of sleep. Example: *"After a long day of work, he was fast asleep within minutes of hitting the bed."*

High and dry: This collocation describes a situation where someone is left in a difficult or vulnerable position. Example: *"When the company went bankrupt, many employees were left high and dry."*

Safe and sound: Reflecting the natural pairing of safety and wellbeing. Example: *"After the storm passed, we were relieved to find our house safe and sound."* (Palmer, 1931)

Phrasal Verbs:

Put off: Originating from the idea of postponing or delaying something. Example: *"I keep putting off cleaning the garage."*

Take off: Originally related to airplanes lifting off the ground, it now means to become successful or popular suddenly. Example: *"The new fashion trend really took off this season."*

Brush up on: Originating from the idea of cleaning or refreshing something, it now means to review or improve one's knowledge or skills. Example: *"Before the exam, I need to brush up on my math."*

Look into: This phrasal verb implies investigating or examining something. Example: *"The detective promised to look into the mysterious disappearance."* (Cowie, 1998)

Fixed Expressions:

Piece of cake: Originating from the idea of something being easy, like eating a piece of cake. It's used to describe tasks or activities that are simple or effortless. Example: *"Don't worry about the exam, it'll be a piece of cake."*

Kick the bucket: This fixed expression is a euphemism for dying, with the "bucket" referring to a hanging noose used in executions. Example: *"He always joked about what he would do before he kicked the bucket."* (Yoon, 2008)

Straight as an arrow: This fixed expression describes something or someone that is perfectly straight or honest. Example: *"His moral compass is straight as an arrow."*

In the blink of an eye: Originating from the idea of how quickly a blink occurs, it describes something happening very rapidly. Example: *"The thief disappeared in the blink of an eye."* (Moon, 1998)

These examples demonstrate how phraseological units in English often have origins rooted in historical events, cultural practices, or metaphorical interpretations, and have evolved over time to become integral parts of the language.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of the origins of phraseological units in English reveals a rich tapestry of linguistic evolution, cultural diffusion, and historical development. Through this study, we have uncovered the multifaceted nature of phraseological units, which encompass idioms, proverbs, collocations, phrasal verbs, and fixed expressions, among others. These linguistic constructs not only serve as fundamental components of communication but also as windows into the historical, cultural, and social contexts in which they emerged.

Our analysis has highlighted the diverse sources from which phraseological units originate, ranging from ancient traditions and folklore to literary works and cross-cultural exchanges. The evolution of phraseological units over time reflects the dynamic nature of language, shaped by socio-political dynamics, technological advancements, and linguistic innovations. Furthermore, the role of cultural diffusion, migration, and globalization has contributed to the enrichment and diversification of English phraseology, illustrating its adaptability and resilience in the face of change.

By synthesizing insights from linguistics, anthropology, and literary studies, this research underscores the importance of understanding phraseological units as linguistic artifacts that embody the complexities of human experience and collective memory. Through their usage in everyday discourse and literary expression, phraseological units not only facilitate communication but also serve as vehicles for cultural transmission and identity formation.

Moving forward, further research into the origins of phraseological units in English can deepen our understanding of language evolution and cultural dynamics. By continuing to explore the intricate interplay between language, culture, and society, we can gain valuable insights into the enduring significance of phraseological units as integral components of the English language landscape. Ultimately, the study of phraseological units offers a gateway to unraveling the rich tapestry of human expression and communication.

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