

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS AND SIMILES

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INTRODUCTION

Phraseology is a significant branch of linguistics that studies stable word combinations known as phraseological units. These units are an essential part of any language because they reflect cultural identity, historical development, and cognitive processes of a speech community. Phraseological units differ from free word combinations in that they are fixed, idiomatic, and often carry meanings that cannot be understood literally. According to A. P. Cowie, phraseological units constitute a core component of vocabulary, combining semantic unity with structural stability. Among various types of phraseological expressions, simile-based constructions occupy a special place due to their vivid imagery and comparative structure.

Similes are figurative expressions that establish a comparison between two different objects or phenomena using markers such as like, as...as in English or kabi, singari, misoli in Uzbek. These expressions are widely used in both everyday communication and literary texts to enhance expressiveness and clarity. For example, English expressions such as as brave as a lion, as busy as a bee, as cold as ice, as light as a feather, as stubborn as a mule, as blind as a bat, as quiet as a mouse, and as quick as lightning demonstrate how similes create strong visual and emotional associations. Uzbek language provides parallel examples like arslondek jasur, ari kabi tinmay ishlamoq, muzdek sovuq, qushdek yengil, eshakdek qaysar, ko'rdek ojiz, sichqondek jim, and chaqmoqdek tez. Rosamund Moon highlights that such fixed expressions are fundamental to natural language use and reflect everyday communicative practices.

The theoretical study of phraseological units and similes is important because it helps linguists understand how meaning is constructed beyond literal interpretation. According to Chitra Fernando, idiomatic expressions require contextual and cultural interpretation, as their meanings are often non-compositional. At the same time, similes remain partially transparent due to their explicit comparative structure.

Similes also play a crucial role in cognitive processes. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that figurative language reflects how people conceptualize the world through familiar images. For instance, expressions like as strong as an ox, as clear as crystal, as deep as the ocean, as bright as the sun, and as hard as stone show how abstract qualities are understood through concrete experiences. Uzbek equivalents such as ho'kizdek kuchli, billurdek tiniq, dengizdek chuqur, quyoshdek yorqin, and toshdek qattiq demonstrate similar cognitive patterns.

From a semantic perspective, phraseological units often exhibit idiomatic meaning that cannot be derived from individual components. Geoffrey Nunberg emphasizes that idioms function as conventionalized expressions stored in the mental lexicon, rather than being generated each time in speech. This supports the idea that phraseological units are retrieved as complete units.

Furthermore, Raymond W. Gibbs Jr. highlights that figurative expressions, including similes, are deeply rooted in human cognition and play a key role in understanding abstract concepts. For example, expressions such as as free as the wind, as proud as a peacock, as hungry as a wolf, and as gentle as a lamb illustrate how human experience is mapped onto language.

Uzbek language also offers a wide range of culturally rich similes: shamolday erkin, tovusdek kerilmoq, bo'ridek och, qo'zidek yuvosh, tog'dek mustahkam, suvdek tiniq, ko'mirdek qora, qordek oppoq. These examples show that while some similes are universal, others are shaped by cultural environment and traditions.

Thus, phraseological units containing similes are not only linguistic elements but also cognitive and cultural tools. Their study helps reveal how language encodes human experience, reflects cultural identity, and facilitates expressive communication.

Methods. The research is based on descriptive, analytical, and comparative linguistic methods. The descriptive method is used to define key concepts such as phraseological units and similes. The analytical method helps to examine their structural and semantic properties. The comparative method is applied to identify similarities and differences between various types of phraseological expressions.

The study also relies on theoretical works in phraseology, cognitive linguistics, and stylistics. These sources provide a scientific foundation for understanding how phraseological units function as part of the language system.

Results and findings. The analysis shows that phraseological units are stable combinations of words that function as a single semantic unit. They are characterized by lexical stability, semantic unity, and reproducibility in speech. According to linguistic theory, phraseological units cannot be freely modified without losing their meaning or stylistic effect.

Similes, as a subtype of figurative expression, are based on explicit comparison between two entities. Unlike metaphors, which imply similarity indirectly, similes use formal markers such as like or as to establish a clear relationship. This makes similes more transparent and easier to interpret, especially in language learning contexts.

One of the key findings is that phraseological units containing similes serve both linguistic and cognitive functions. Linguistically, they enrich vocabulary and make speech more expressive. Cognitively, they help speakers conceptualize abstract ideas through familiar images. For example, describing someone as as busy as a bee allows speakers to convey intensity of activity using a simple natural image.

Another important result is that similes often reflect cultural values and social experiences. Different languages use different images to express similar meanings. For instance, English uses as white as snow, while Uzbek uses qordek oppoq. This demonstrates that similes are culturally embedded and reflect the environment, traditions, and worldview of a linguistic community.

The study also shows that phraseological units with similes can be classified according to their structure and meaning. Structurally, they can be simple (single comparison) or complex (extended comparison). Semantically, they can express physical characteristics, emotional states, behavior, or abstract qualities.

In addition, simile-based phraseological units are widely used in literature, journalism, and everyday speech. They enhance stylistic richness and help speakers communicate more effectively. Their use increases emotional impact and improves the aesthetic quality of language.

Discussion. The theoretical analysis of phraseological units and similes demonstrates that these linguistic phenomena are deeply connected with human cognition and cultural experience. According to cognitive linguistics, language is not only a system of rules but also a

reflection of mental processes. Similes help structure human thought by linking unfamiliar concepts to familiar experiences.

Phraseological units, including similes, are considered part of the lexical system of language. They are stored in the mental lexicon as fixed expressions and are retrieved as complete units during speech production. This supports the idea that language users do not construct these expressions each time but rather access them as ready-made formulas.

Cultural linguistics also plays an important role in understanding similes. Each culture develops its own system of images and associations that are reflected in language. For example, animals, natural elements, and social roles are commonly used in simile constructions. These cultural references provide insight into how different societies perceive the world. Another important aspect is the role of similes in communication. They make speech more vivid, persuasive, and emotionally engaging. In addition, they are widely used in teaching foreign languages because they help learners understand figurative meaning through clear comparisons.

The study also highlights the importance of context in interpreting phraseological units. The meaning of similes may vary depending on situational, cultural, and pragmatic factors. Therefore, understanding these expressions requires not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural awareness.

Conclusion. The theoretical study of phraseological units and similes shows that they are essential components of language that contribute to its expressiveness, richness, and cognitive depth. Phraseological units represent stable lexical combinations with idiomatic meaning, while similes function as comparative expressions that enhance clarity and imagery. The analysis confirms that similes play an important role in both linguistic structure and communication. They bridge the gap between abstract concepts and concrete experience, making language more accessible and expressive.

In conclusion, phraseological units and similes should be viewed not only as linguistic structures but also as cognitive and cultural phenomena. Their study provides valuable insights into how language functions as a tool for thought, communication, and cultural expression. Further research in this field may focus on cross-linguistic comparison, cognitive mechanisms of phrase formation, and their role in language teaching and translation.

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