

LINGUOCULTUROLOGICAL FEATURES OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN MODERN ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

Kubaeva Nafisa Alisher qizi,
*researcher of Samarkand State institute
of foreign languages, Uzbekistan*
nafisaxon77777@gmail.com

Abstract

Phraseological units in modern English short stories are not only tools of stylistic expressiveness but also carriers of cultural values, worldviews, and national identity. This article explores the linguoculturological features of such units, analyzing their semantic depth, cultural specificity, and contextual adaptation. Drawing upon principles from cultural linguistics and phraseology, the article examines how idioms, metaphors, and fixed expressions function within English literary discourse to reflect Anglo-Saxon cultural norms, collective consciousness, and historical experiences. The findings underline the critical role phraseological units play in preserving cultural memory and enhancing narrative color in contemporary English fiction.

Keywords: phraseological units, linguoculturology, idioms, English short stories, cultural linguistics, proverbs, metaphor, cultural identity, literary discourse, translation

Introduction

In literary language, especially in the genre of short stories, writers often utilize phraseological units—idioms, proverbs, and figurative expressions—to encapsulate ideas that resonate with readers both cognitively and culturally. These units serve dual functions: semantically, they enrich the text with non-literal, symbolic meaning; culturally, they embody historically formed knowledge and sociocultural perspectives.

The integration of linguoculturological analysis into the study of phraseology reveals how deeply language is embedded in culture. In modern English short stories, phraseological units are often key to understanding character psychology, intertextuality, irony, humor, and narrative tone. Therefore, an analysis of their linguoculturological features sheds light on how language and culture intertwine in contemporary fiction [1].

Theoretical Framework: Linguoculturology and Phraseology

Linguoculturology is an interdisciplinary field that combines linguistics, cultural studies, and cognitive science to explore how language reflects and shapes cultural consciousness. According to cultural linguistics, language is a system of culturally constructed categories, metaphors, schemas, and values (Sharifian, 2017).

Phraseological units, being stable word combinations, often store these cultural concepts in a compact and memorable form [2].

The study of phraseology within this framework emphasizes:

- The cultural semantics of idioms;
- The symbolic and metaphorical worldview reflected in phraseological expressions;
- The emotional and moral evaluations encoded in them;
- Their communicative and pragmatic functions in discourse.

Phraseological Units in Modern English Short Stories: A Cultural Lens

Modern English short stories by writers such as Raymond Carver, Jhumpa Lahiri, Alice Munro, and Zadie Smith illustrate a rich tapestry of phraseological usage. These units often serve to reflect the socio-cultural realities of characters, provide humor or irony, and enhance reader engagement through familiar linguistic patterns [3].

1. Idioms as Carriers of Anglo-Saxon Worldview

Idioms like “the last straw,” “break the ice,” or “turn a blind eye” convey emotional or evaluative meaning rooted in shared cultural experience. For example, in Carver’s minimalist stories, a character’s decision to “bury the hatchet” is not just a linguistic act but a deeply embedded cultural gesture of reconciliation. Such idioms often imply underlying values such as pragmatism, individualism, or moral restraint, which are characteristic of English-speaking cultures [4].

2. Proverbs and Folk Wisdom in Literary Contexts

Though less frequent than idioms, proverbs like “what goes around comes around” or “don’t judge a book by its cover” may appear in direct speech or narration, acting as narrative commentary. These proverbs encode collective folk knowledge and function as cognitive tools for interpreting events and human behavior. Their presence in short stories helps preserve cultural memory and offers implicit moral frameworks within the plot [5].

3. Emotional and Pragmatic Nuance

Phraseological units often carry connotative meaning beyond their literal sense. In English fiction, expressions like “walking on eggshells” or “keep it under your hat” not only indicate emotional states like anxiety or secrecy but also create a shared understanding between narrator and reader. This shared understanding is a culturally constructed phenomenon, enabled by a common pool of linguistic-cultural knowledge [6].

Linguoculturological Characteristics of Phraseological Units

Drawing on the source Cultural Linguistics (NamDU, 2024), we can outline the following key features of phraseological units from a linguoculturological perspective:

a) Cultural Symbolism and Metaphor

Many English idioms are metaphorical in nature, drawing from culturally significant images. For instance:

- “Red tape” symbolizes bureaucratic delay rooted in British administrative history.
- “Throw in the towel” is a boxing metaphor, reflecting the cultural prevalence of sports [7].

Such metaphors reveal historical contexts and cultural priorities—values of competition, discipline, or systemic control.

b) Cultural Stereotypes and Archetypes

Idioms like “a wolf in sheep’s clothing” or “busy bee” reflect stereotypical character roles rooted in Western folklore and religious tradition. These expressions survive in literature because they still resonate with readers as archetypes [8].

c) Intercultural Untranslatability

Some phraseological units are culturally unique and lose their force when translated directly. For example:

- “To eat humble pie” (to admit fault) has no exact equivalent in many languages [9].
- This untranslatability stems from culturally bound historical references, like 17th-century British social customs.

In short stories, the retention or adaptation of such idioms requires cultural sensitivity in translation and interpretation.

Phraseology and Cultural Identity in Literary Discourse

Phraseological units in literary texts act as cultural markers. They signal belonging, irony, or distance depending on how they are used. In multicultural or postcolonial English short stories, idioms may be used intentionally to show contrast or hybrid identity [10].

For instance, a British-born Indian character in a short story by Zadie Smith might consciously misuse or reinterpret an idiom like “hit the nail on the head,” playing with its cultural expectations. This interplay becomes a literary strategy for negotiating identity and linguistic agency.

Conclusion

Phraseological units in modern English short stories serve as dynamic elements of cultural expression. They compress complex meanings into vivid, memorable forms that reflect historical memory, collective values, and national identity. A linguoculturological approach allows us to uncover the cultural logic behind these expressions and understand how they function in contemporary literature.

By analyzing idioms and proverbs within modern English narratives, we see how writers use fixed expressions not only to decorate the text but to anchor it in shared

cultural knowledge. Such units function as bridges between language and culture, author and reader, tradition and innovation.

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