

SEMANTIC FEATURES OF SOMATIC PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN ENGLISH

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Abstract: *This article examines the semantic features of somatic phraseological units in the English language. Somatic idioms containing body-part names reflect human emotions, behavior, and cultural perception. The study analyzes their figurative meanings, emotional expressiveness, and metaphorical character using semantic and descriptive methods. The results demonstrate that somatic phraseological units play an important role in enriching English phraseology and intercultural communication.*

Keywords: *somatic phraseological units, phraseology, semantics, idioms, English language, metaphor, figurative meaning, linguistic analysis*

Introduction

Phraseological units constitute an important part of the vocabulary of every language. They enrich speech, increase emotional expressiveness, and reflect the cultural and historical development of society [1]. Among various types of phraseological units, somatic phraseological expressions occupy a significant place due to their high frequency and semantic diversity [2].

The term “somatic” derives from the Greek word *soma*, meaning “body.” Consequently, somatic phraseological units are idiomatic expressions containing names of body parts. Such expressions are widely represented in the English language. Examples include “lose one’s head,” “keep an eye on,” “cold feet,” “lend a hand,” and “learn by heart” [3].

Human body parts have always been associated with emotions, intellect, behavior, and physical activity. For this reason, somatic components often acquire symbolic meanings and become the basis for metaphorical expressions [5]. These phraseological units are not interpreted literally; instead, they express figurative meanings formed through cultural and cognitive associations.

The relevance of this study is determined by the growing interest in phraseology, semantics, and intercultural communication. Understanding the semantic features of somatic idioms contributes to better comprehension of linguistic imagery and cultural symbolism in English.

The aim of this article is to analyze the semantic characteristics of somatic phraseological units in English and identify their expressive and functional features.

Theoretical Background of Somatic Phraseology

Phraseology is a branch of linguistics that studies stable word combinations with partially or completely transferred meanings [4]. Phraseological units differ from free word combinations because their structure is fixed and their meanings are often idiomatic.

Somatic phraseological units represent one of the most ancient layers of phraseology [8]. Since the human body is universally familiar,

body-part vocabulary became a natural source for metaphorical interpretation. In many cases, body organs symbolize specific human qualities or emotional states.

For example:

- the “head” is associated with intelligence and thinking;
- the “heart” symbolizes emotions and kindness;
- the “eyes” represent attention and perception;
- the “hands” indicate work, assistance, or control.

The semantic structure of somatic idioms is usually based on metaphorical transfer [5]. Literal meanings of body parts gradually develop figurative interpretations connected with social and psychological experience.

Researchers emphasize that phraseological meaning is characterized by semantic integrity, expressiveness, and emotional coloring. Therefore, somatic phraseological units function not only as linguistic elements but also as cultural symbols [1].

Semantic Features of Somatic Phraseological Units

Figurative Meaning

One of the main semantic characteristics of somatic phraseological units is figurativeness. The meaning of the entire expression differs from the direct meanings of its components [2].

For example:

- “lose one’s head” means to panic or become emotionally confused;
- “cold feet” means fear or uncertainty before an important action;
- “keep an eye on” means to watch or supervise carefully [7].

These expressions cannot be understood through literal interpretation because their meanings are metaphorical.

Figurativeness increases the emotional and stylistic richness of speech. It also makes communication more vivid and expressive.

Emotional and Expressive Function

Somatic idioms frequently express emotional states and attitudes. Many of them convey fear, happiness, anger, excitement, or disappointment.

Examples include:

- “have a big heart” — to be kind and generous;
- “pain in the neck” — an annoying person;
- “hot-headed” — easily angered [3].

Such expressions intensify emotional impact and allow speakers to communicate feelings more effectively.

The expressive nature of somatic phraseological units explains their wide usage in everyday speech, literature, journalism, and media discourse.

Metaphorical Character

Metaphor plays a central role in the formation of somatic phraseological units [5]. Physical experiences connected with the human body become sources of abstract meanings.

For instance:

- “heart” metaphorically represents love, kindness, and sincerity;
- “head” symbolizes intellect and rationality;
- “backbone” refers to strength and determination.

The metaphorical basis of somatic idioms demonstrates the connection between language and human cognition. Speakers interpret abstract concepts through familiar bodily experiences.

This phenomenon is closely related to conceptual metaphor theory, according to which human thinking is largely metaphorical in nature [5].

Polysemy and Semantic Flexibility

Some somatic phraseological units possess polysemantic characteristics. Their meanings may vary depending on context [4].

For example, the expression “give a hand” can mean:

1. physical help;
2. assistance in general;
3. applause in informal communication.

Semantic flexibility allows phraseological units to adapt to different communicative situations.

However, despite contextual variation, the core figurative meaning usually remains stable.

Cultural Symbolism

Somatic phraseological units reflect cultural traditions and collective perceptions [1]. Certain body parts acquire symbolic significance in English-speaking culture.

For example:

- “heart” is strongly associated with emotions and compassion;
- “face” often symbolizes reputation and dignity;
- “eye” represents observation and attention.

Cultural symbolism influences the semantic interpretation of idioms and contributes to national linguistic identity.

Although many somatic symbols are universal, some meanings are culturally specific and may create difficulties in translation or intercultural communication.

Functional Role of Somatic Phraseological Units

Somatic phraseological units perform several important linguistic functions.

First, they enrich vocabulary and make speech more expressive. Second, they simplify communication by conveying complex emotions or situations through concise figurative expressions. Third, they preserve cultural knowledge and traditional imagery.

In literary texts, somatic idioms contribute to characterization, emotional atmosphere, and stylistic individuality. In spoken language, they increase naturalness and communicative effectiveness [6].

Due to their semantic richness and imagery, somatic phraseological units remain highly productive in modern English.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that somatic phraseological units occupy an important position in English phraseology. Their semantic structure is based on figurative interpretation, metaphorical transfer, emotional expressiveness, and cultural symbolism.

The study shows that body-part components function as important conceptual elements in the formation of idiomatic meanings. Somatic phraseological units not only enrich speech stylistically but also reflect human cognition, emotions, and cultural experience.

The semantic features of these expressions include metaphorical meaning, emotional coloring, semantic flexibility, and symbolic

interpretation. Such characteristics make somatic idioms an essential object of linguistic and semantic research.

Further investigation of somatic phraseology may contribute to comparative linguistics, intercultural communication, translation studies, and cognitive linguistics.

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