

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOMATIC PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS
IN ENGLISH: SEMANTIC, STRUCTURAL, AND COGNITIVE ASPECTS

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Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola ingliz tilidagi somatik frazeologik birliklarning (SFB) semantik, tuzilmaviy va kognitiv xususiyatlarini qiyosiy tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqot inson tana a'zolari nomlarini o'z ichiga olgan barqaror iboralarning kognitiv metafora, metonimiya va madaniy kod orqali qanday shakllanishini, qanday ma'no ifodalashini hamda nutqda qanday funksiyalar bajarishini ko'rsatadi. Tahlil natijasida SFBning ingliz tili frazeologik tizimida markaziy o'rin egallashi va ularning til, tafakkur va madaniyat o'rtasidagi aloqani aks ettirishidagi roli asoslanadi.

Kalit so'zlar

somatik frazeologik birlik, kognitiv metafora, semantik tahlil, frazeologiya, ingliz tili, til dunyoqarashi.

Аннотация

В данной статье проводится сравнительный анализ соматических фразеологических единиц (СФЕ) в английском языке с точки зрения семантических, структурных и когнитивных характеристик. В исследовании показано, каким образом устойчивые выражения, содержащие наименования частей тела, формируются посредством концептуальной метафоры, метонимии и культурного кодирования, какие значения они передают и какие функции выполняют в речи. По результатам анализа обосновывается центральная роль СФЕ во фразеологической системе английского языка и их значение как отражения взаимосвязи языка, мышления и культуры.

Ключевые слова

соматическая фразеологическая единица, концептуальная метафора, семантический анализ, фразеология, английский язык, языковая картина мира.

Abstract

This article presents a comparative analysis of somatic phraseological units (SPUs) in English from semantic, structural, and cognitive perspectives. The study demonstrates how fixed expressions incorporating human body part lexemes are

formed through conceptual metaphor, metonymy, and cultural coding, what meanings they convey, and what functions they perform in discourse. The findings confirm that SPUs occupy a central place in the English phraseological system and serve as a powerful reflection of the interconnection between language, cognition, and culture.

Keywords

somatic phraseological unit, conceptual metaphor, semantic analysis, phraseology, English language, linguistic worldview.

1. INTRODUCTION

Phraseology, as an essential branch of linguistics, investigates fixed expressions, idioms, and set word combinations that function as single semantic units. Among the various subgroups within this field, somatic phraseological units (SPUs) – stable expressions containing lexical components that denote parts of the human body – occupy a particularly significant and productive position. Their importance derives from the anthropocentric nature of language, whereby human bodily experience shapes and organizes linguistic expression.

Somatic idioms such as "to keep an eye on", "to break someone's heart", "to give a hand", "to lose one's head", and "to have cold feet" are deeply embedded in everyday English communication. They reflect not only conventional usage patterns but also underlying cognitive processes and cultural associations. Through metaphorical mappings, concrete bodily functions and sensations are transformed into abstract meanings: the heart conveys emotion, the head represents intellect, and the hands symbolize action and agency.

The relevance of this research is determined by several factors. First, modern linguistics increasingly embraces cognitive and cultural perspectives, viewing language as a mirror of human thought and identity. Second, globalization and growing intercultural communication demand a deeper understanding of idiomatic expressions, as their misinterpretation may hinder effective communication. Third, despite extensive research on phraseology in general, somatic phraseological units remain underexplored from a combined comparative, cognitive, and cultural standpoint.

The aim of this article is to conduct a systematic analysis of English somatic phraseological units with respect to their etymology, semantic typology, structural patterns, and linguocultural significance. The study employs descriptive, comparative, semantic, componential, and cognitive methods of analysis.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Phraseology is a distinct branch of linguistics dealing with multi-word expressions characterized by stability, semantic integrity, and reproducibility.

Unlike free word combinations, phraseological units resist lexical or grammatical substitution and are stored in the mental lexicon as prefabricated wholes. V.V. Vinogradov's foundational classification distinguishes three types based on idiomaticity: phraseological fusions (fully non-compositional), phraseological unities (partially motivated), and phraseological combinations (relatively transparent) [1].

Somatic phraseological units constitute a core subgroup of phraseology defined by the presence of body-part lexemes such as head, heart, eye, hand, face, mouth, back, and tongue. The term "somatic" derives from the Greek soma (body). These units are considered particularly significant because the human body is one of the most fundamental and universal cognitive reference points; it serves as the primary source domain through which abstract concepts are conceptualized in language [2].

The theoretical framework for analyzing SPUs draws heavily on cognitive linguistics, especially George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which posits that abstract reasoning is systematically structured through mappings from concrete bodily experience onto abstract target domains. Thus, idiomatic expressions involving body parts are not arbitrary but reflect systematic conceptual structures rooted in embodied human experience [3].

The linguocultural dimension is equally important. Phraseological units encode cultural values, historical memory, and collective worldview. Many somatic idioms have survived for centuries because they reflect enduring aspects of human experience and social interaction, making them cultural fossils preserved in language [4].

3. SEMANTIC TYPOLOGY AND FUNCTIONAL CLASSIFICATION

The semantic analysis of English SPUs reveals that different body parts serve as stable conceptual anchors for specific experiential and abstract domains. The following table summarizes the primary associations:

Table 1. Semantic Classification of English SPUs

Body Part	Semantic Domain	Examples
Heart	Emotions, moral values	to break someone's heart; to lose heart; warm-hearted
Head	Intellect, rational control	to lose one's head; to use one's head; level-headed
Hand	Action, agency, responsibility	to give a hand; to have the upper hand; to take matters into one's own hands
Eye	Perception, awareness, attention	to keep an eye on; to turn a blind eye; to catch someone's eye

Face	Social identity, reputation	to save face; to lose face; to put on a brave face
Mouth/Tongue	Speech, communication	to hold one's tongue; to put words in someone's mouth; to speak from the heart
Back	Support, loyalty/betrayal	to have someone's back; to stab someone in the back

The emotional semantic group is the most productive, with the heart serving as the dominant somatic element. Expressions such as "to break someone's heart", "to wear one's heart on one's sleeve", and "to have a change of heart" illustrate how emotional experience is conceptualized through physical association with the heart – a tradition rooted in ancient and medieval physiology that regarded the heart as the seat of feeling [5].

The cognitive semantic field, centered on head and brain, captures intellectual processes and mental control. "To lose one's head" implies failure of rational judgment under pressure, while "to have a good head for something" suggests aptitude. The systematic nature of these mappings supports the cognitive linguistic view that language is not arbitrary but emerges from embodied experience.

Social and interpersonal meanings are richly encoded through SPUs involving face, back, and shoulder. The "face" cluster – to save face, to lose face, to face the music – reflects the cultural salience of social reputation and dignity. Meanwhile, back-related idioms contrast solidarity ("to have someone's back") with betrayal ("to stab someone in the back"), encoding fundamental social norms.

Beyond these major categories, SPUs also serve evaluative and moral functions. Compound adjectives such as "cold-hearted", "warm-hearted", "big-headed", and "tight-fisted" encode personality evaluations directly into the lexical-phraseological system, functioning as concise moral and social judgments.

4. STRUCTURAL PATTERNS AND GRAMMATICAL REALIZATION

From a structural perspective, English SPUs are organized into several main grammatical types, each fulfilling specific syntactic and communicative functions:

Verbal phrases constitute the most productive structural category. These consist of a verb combined with a noun phrase containing a somatic element, typically forming the predicate of a sentence. Examples include "to give a hand", "to lose one's head", "to keep an eye on", and "to bite one's tongue". Verbal SPUs can be conjugated across tense, aspect, and voice while retaining their idiomatic meaning – for instance, "she lost her head", "he has been keeping an eye on the situation" – demonstrating that structural flexibility coexists with semantic stability.

Nominal phrases such as "a cold shoulder", "a big mouth", and "a long face" function as subjects or objects and are predominantly used for characterization and description. These forms tend to be structurally more rigid than verbal idioms.

Adjectival constructions, including "empty-headed", "cold-hearted", and "light-fingered", function as modifiers encoding evaluative attributes. Adverbial expressions such as "by heart", "in the blink of an eye", and "under one's nose" modify verbs or clauses to indicate manner, speed, or proximity.

A defining structural feature of SPUs is the widespread use of possessive constructions: "one's head", "one's heart", "one's hands". This pattern emphasizes the personal and embodied nature of idiomatic meaning, reinforcing the anthropocentric orientation of language. For example, in "to lose one's head", the possessive pronoun anchors the experience to individual agency and identity.

The degree of idiomaticity directly correlates with structural rigidity. Fully idiomatic expressions such as "to kick the bucket" resist syntactic transformation – passive constructions, for instance, are largely impermissible – while semi-idiomatic expressions allow greater flexibility. This continuum from full idiomaticity to transparency is a fundamental property of the phraseological system [6].

Certain stylistic features also contribute to the memorability of SPUs. Phonetic patterning through alliteration and rhythm – "hand in hand", "neck and neck", "face to face" – enhances the psychological salience of these expressions and contributes to their diachronic stability.

5. ETYMOLOGICAL ORIGINS AND LEXICALIZATION PROCESSES

The etymological study of English somatic idioms reveals a rich interplay between language, history, and culture. The origins of these expressions can be traced to several key sources:

Classical mythology and antiquity constitute one of the earliest sources. The idiom "Achilles' heel" derives from Greek mythology, where Achilles' vulnerability to a wound in the heel symbolizes a hidden fatal weakness. Similarly, "to wash one's hands of something" echoes both ancient ritual practices and the biblical account of Pontius Pilate, encoding the concept of moral disengagement [7].

Religious texts, particularly the Bible, have shaped English phraseology profoundly. "The apple of one's eye" – meaning something or someone cherished above all else – appears in Deuteronomy 32:10, with the eye symbolizing something precious and protected. The widespread penetration of biblical language into everyday English reflects the historical centrality of religious texts in shaping the linguistic worldview.

Historical practices and social customs have also generated somatic idioms. "To give someone the cold shoulder", meaning to treat someone with deliberate

indifference, is thought to derive from the practice of serving a cold shoulder of mutton to unwelcome guests as a sign of displeasure. "To keep one's nose to the grindstone" recalls the labor of sharpening tools, metaphorically extended to mean diligent, unrelenting effort.

Literary creativity, especially the works of William Shakespeare, has left an indelible mark on English somatic phraseology. Expressions such as "to wear one's heart on one's sleeve" (Othello) and "to lend a hand" were popularized through Shakespearean usage and subsequently became entrenched in the general lexicon. This illustrates the role of literary language as a vector for phraseological innovation and standardization [8].

The process of semantic change is central to the history of somatic idioms. Most have undergone a shift from literal to figurative meaning through metaphorical extension. "To bite one's tongue" originally described a physical action; its current meaning – restraining oneself from speaking – arose through the cognitive mapping of physical self-control onto communicative restraint. This trajectory from concrete to abstract is consistent across most SPUs and supports embodied cognition as the underlying mechanism.

6. LINGUOCULTURAL DIMENSION AND LINGUISTIC WORLDVIEW

Somatic phraseological units play a fundamental role in shaping and expressing the linguistic worldview – the system of culturally shared concepts, values, and interpretations that are encoded in language. The anthropocentric principle holds that the human body is the primary cognitive model through which individuals structure their understanding of the world [9].

While many body-part metaphors exhibit cross-linguistic universality – the heart as the locus of emotion, the head as the locus of reason – English somatic idioms also carry culture-specific meanings. The cluster of face-related idioms ("to save face", "to lose face", "to put on a brave face") reflects the cultural emphasis on social reputation and impression management. These expressions encode a value system in which public identity and the perception of others are of significant social importance.

The evaluative function of SPUs is especially visible in compound adjectives and descriptive nominal phrases. Terms such as "cold-hearted", "warm-hearted", "big-headed", and "open-handed" encode moral and social judgments directly into the lexical system. By employing somatic imagery, these expressions link abstract evaluations to embodied sensory experience, making them cognitively vivid and rhetorically effective.

SPUs also function as carriers of cultural memory. Historical, literary, and religious associations preserved in somatic idioms transmit collective knowledge across generations. Expressions originating in classical antiquity, religious texts, or

Shakespearean drama continue to operate in contemporary English, serving as linguistic fossils that encode the historical and cultural heritage of the speech community [10].

From a comparative perspective, the study of SPUs highlights both the universality of embodied cognition and the specificity of cultural interpretation. While the conceptual mapping of the heart to emotions or the head to thought appears in many languages, the specific lexical realizations, connotations, and usage norms of somatic idioms are language- and culture-specific. This duality – universal cognitive foundation with culture-specific surface realization – makes SPUs an ideal subject for cross-linguistic and intercultural research.

7. DISCUSSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this analysis have significant implications for several applied domains. In English language teaching, somatic phraseological units present a persistent challenge for learners at all proficiency levels. Their non-compositional meanings, cultural specificity, and structural fixedness mean that they cannot be decoded through word-by-word translation. Effective pedagogy requires contextualized instruction, exposure to authentic discourse, and explicit attention to cultural associations. Cognitive and image-schematic approaches – in which learners map the metaphorical basis of an idiom – have shown particular promise [11].

In translation studies, SPUs are among the most challenging categories to render across languages. Translators must navigate between functional equivalence, cultural adaptation, and stylistic preservation. A direct equivalent may exist in the target language, or a descriptive paraphrase may be required. Awareness of the cognitive and cultural basis of somatic idioms can guide translators in making principled choices that preserve both meaning and pragmatic effect.

In intercultural communication, differences in somatic imagery can generate misunderstanding even between proficient speakers. Idioms that appear structurally similar across languages may carry different connotations or presuppositions. Intercultural competence therefore requires not only knowledge of idiomatic forms but also sensitivity to their cultural loading.

The present analysis also contributes to lexicographic practice. Phraseological dictionaries benefit from descriptions that include cognitive motivation, cultural origin, evaluative connotation, and usage context – dimensions that are often underrepresented in existing reference works.

8. CONCLUSION

This article has presented a multidimensional analysis of somatic phraseological units in English, integrating etymological, semantic, structural,

cognitive, and linguocultural perspectives. The following principal conclusions can be drawn:

First, SPUs are among the most productive and semantically rich groups in English phraseology. Their meanings are predominantly figurative and arise through conceptual metaphor and metonymy, mapping bodily experience onto abstract domains such as emotion, intellect, social relations, and moral evaluation.

Second, different body parts serve as stable conceptual anchors for distinct semantic fields: the heart for emotions, the head for cognition, the hands for action, the eyes for perception, and the face for social identity. These associations are cognitively motivated and reflect the anthropocentric structure of language.

Third, English SPUs display a variety of grammatical structures – verbal, nominal, adjectival, and adverbial – each fulfilling specific syntactic and communicative functions. Structural stability is a defining feature, though it coexists with a degree of grammatical flexibility.

Fourth, the etymological analysis confirms that somatic idioms originate from diverse sources – mythology, religion, history, literature, and everyday practice – and have undergone semantic evolution from literal to figurative meaning.

Fifth, SPUs function as cultural artifacts that encode collective values, historical memory, and social norms, making them a key component of the linguistic worldview and a bridge between language, cognition, and culture.

These findings carry practical relevance for English language teaching, translation practice, lexicography, and intercultural communication. Future research may profitably extend this analysis through corpus-linguistic methods and systematic contrastive comparison with Uzbek and other languages.

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