

Interpretation Phraseological Units Denoting Cultural Identity

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Abstract. *This article is devoted to the ethnocultural interpretation of phraseological units formed on the basis of the ethnocultural views of the people in both Uzbek and English. The article demonstrates through examples that phraseological units serve both as a source of information about a people's culture and as a vivid linguistic expression of national-cultural linguistic identity.*

Key words: *cultural stereotypes, models, ethnocultural symbols, national mentality, linguacultural identity.*

Introduction. It is known from history that the spiritual character of every nation—that is, its national mentality—is shaped within the framework of its unique historical, ethnic, natural, and climatic conditions. Therefore, its attitude toward the social and political events occurring in society and historical processes is undoubtedly distinct. Indeed, national particularities are determined by long-term socio-economic and political processes, natural geographical location, mutual ethnocultural interactions, and religious affiliations; it is precisely on this basis—and on the ethnocultural views of the people—that phraseological units are formed.

Phraseological units are linguistic expressions that convey information about a culture and express national distinctiveness. The cultural semantic component of a phraseological meaning not only signifies evaluative attitudes but also provides information about a people's unique national identity and ethnocultural heritage. In this sense, phraseological units serve as both a source of cultural information and a vivid linguistic embodiment of national-cultural linguistic identity. They play an essential role in preserving and enriching the mentality and culture of a people. As linguist V.A. Maslova emphasizes, “phraseological units in their semantic structure express the long-term development process of a people's culture, transmitting and imprinting cultural stereotypes, models, and archetypes from generation to generation.” In this way, phraseological units are closely linked with stereotypes, as these stereotypes are associated with specific concepts or images expressed in the phraseological units. Moreover, phraseologisms stand out from other linguistic units by imparting imagery, expressiveness, and emotionality to speech.

Research Methodology. The ethnocultural symbols embedded in phraseological units are related to the formation of a nation's worldview, including its material, social, or spiritual culture. Hence, they are significant because they provide information about that nation's cultural experiences, traditions, and customs.

It is well known that the geographical environment (climate, fauna, animal world, landscape, etc.) determines the lexical composition of languages associated with a particular meaning. For example, the fact that Great Britain is an island, that its winters are very mild with frequent fog, that its forests are home to wild birds and animals, that its meadows bloom with various flowers, and that historical buildings from different eras exist—all alongside its surrounding ocean, sea, inland rivers, lakes, low mountains, and valleys—are reflected in the words, word combinations, expressions, idioms,

proverbs, and sayings in the vocabulary of the English language. Because the English have water, an island, and forests as part of their natural environment, there is a greater prevalence of words related to these themes compared to Uzbek; this includes names for ships, boats, the sea, river, lake and its fish, as well as names for forest berries and mushrooms. In contrast, since the Uzbek people have long been engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry, these aspects are likewise reflected in their phraseological units.

In general, phraseologisms are a vivid expression of a people's lifestyle, culture, enlightenment, and national distinctiveness. The primary meanings of phraseological units are largely lost or are reinterpreted. In this sense, phraseologisms are regarded as a secondary language phenomenon, although some scholars consider them as purely semantic phenomena. Nevertheless, the word components of phraseologisms retain their meanings and are understood in the light of a preserved linguacultural semantic background. Certainly, extralinguistic factors—including history, national values, national-spiritual heritage, customs, regional distinctiveness, events, and historical processes—play an important role in the formation and evolution of phraseologisms. Humanity has always maintained a close relationship with the animals and plants of the world for specific reasons: firstly, because the animal and plant worlds are one of the main sources of nourishment; secondly, because they have served as auxiliary labor in daily life; and thirdly, because they have been the primary means for hunting. This intimate relationship has led people to gain a profound understanding of the secrets of the animal and plant worlds, to keep domestic animals close, to make effective use of their assistance, and to treat wild animals with serious responsibility—that is, to regard them with special attention.

Results and Discussions. Among Uzbeks, animals and birds such as wolves, camels, bears, horses, sheep, snakes, fish, larks, eagles, roosters, and partridges are regarded with respect. It is no coincidence that the emblem of independent Uzbekistan features the image of a mythical bird. Similarly, our people hold special beliefs regarding trees—both fruit-bearing and non-fruit-bearing—such as the plane tree, jujube, pomegranate, and poplar. Indeed, these animals, birds, and trees are venerated as totems; however, upon closer reflection, it becomes clear that the underlying beliefs have their own distinct, unique meanings. For instance, the wolf is admired for its independence and bravery; the camel for its resilience in the face of water scarcity; the horse for its loyalty and agility; the eagle for its strength and combative nature; the plane tree for its longevity; the pomegranate for its abundance of seeds (symbolizing offspring); and the poplar for its drooping branches from which objects like cradles or traditional musical instruments (dutar) are fashioned—qualities that are highly esteemed among the people. It is not by chance that in ancient legends and fairy tales, images such as the wolf, snake, bear, horse, and lark frequently appear. Moreover, the influence of belief is evident in the naming of children with names like Bo'riboy, Bo'ritosh, Bo'rigul, Lochin, Arslon, Qo'ziboy, or Yo'lbars.

It is evident that the uniqueness with which different peoples conceptualize and understand the world—their national-cultural and national-connotative information—is directly embodied in phraseological units.

Consider the proverb “Without wind, even the top of a tree does not move” (i.e., “Not even a bird flies without a reason”), which reflects the philosophical views of the people. Indeed, every event in nature and society has a specific cause; there is no consequence without a cause. For example, the spread of a rumor among the people is taken to imply that there is some truth behind it.

Another example is the saying “A partner does not share food with a dog.” Just as two dogs eating from one bowl end up quarreling, this phrase is used mockingly and ironically to refer to people who, despite working in partnership, eventually come into conflict.

There is also a series of expressions—“Even one who follows behind drinks water (for instance, on the pretext of wheat, even a ‘qoramug’ drinks water; because of a flower, a thorn drinks water; from behind a lake, even a ‘kölmak’ drinks water)”—which illustrate how individuals may benefit from association, regardless of their own merit. The phrase “As is appropriate to a donkey” refers to the various methods once used to harness donkeys. Expensive donkeys were harnessed with a chain and

lock, their keys kept in a pocket, while more ordinary donkeys were fitted with a harness woven like a leather whip. Cheap, insignificant donkeys had their front legs tied with a belt or rope. Metaphorically, this expression is used when minimal effort is considered sufficient, when hesitation is warranted, or when proper respect is lacking.

Another expression, “Whether the wolf eats or not, its mouth is bloody,” refers to the perpetual stained appearance of a wolf’s mouth—it is even sometimes called a “qashqir.” Because the wolf is always seen with its mouth open and its red tongue hanging, it appears as if its mouth is always bloodstained. Metaphorically, this phrase is used to criticize a person who, despite having a history of betrayal and crimes, later abandons those ways; the wrongly accused person employs this phrase to assert his innocence.

In English, drawing on A.V. Kunin’s English–Russian phraseological dictionary, we briefly examine the etymological histories of certain phraseological units that contain zoonymic (animal-based) and phytonymic (plant-based) components.

- **Valaam’s ass:** According to Biblical narratives, when the Jewish prophet Valaam (from the Old Testament) was setting out to meet the enemy, the donkey he rode began to speak due to divine power. Consequently, this expression is used to refer to a devout, honest person who expresses his objections candidly.
- **Bull of Bashan:** Bashan is a place mentioned in the Bible known for its exceptionally fertile pastures where enormous oxen roamed. Today, the phrase is used metaphorically to describe a person with a powerful voice or a formidable presence.
- **Kilkenny cats:** The origin of this expression can be traced back to Ireland. It is said that in 19th-century County Kilkenny, wild cats were set upon in such a fierce fight that, in the end, only their tails survived. Nowadays, this phrase refers to people who are bitter enemies of one another.
- **Straight from the horse’s mouth:** In English culture, horse racing has long been celebrated as a national festival. People would bet on the horses in a race, but some astute bettors would inspect a horse’s teeth by opening its mouth to determine its age before placing their bets. Thus, the expression means obtaining information directly from the original source.
- **White elephant:** This expression is not originally an English idiom but was adopted from Eastern cultures. It is said that the king of Siam had a custom of gifting white elephants to his subordinates, and in turn, the white elephant was revered among the Thai people. However, since maintaining an elephant was extremely costly and, due to its sacred status, its owner would rarely display it publicly, the expression came to refer to an unnecessary, expensive gift.
- **Under the rose:** This expression, too, is not originally from English culture but entered the language through Latin. In ancient Rome, a rose was hung in large state assemblies as a symbol of silence, indicating that what was heard or seen should not be disclosed.
- **A bull in a china shop:** According to some theories, this phrase originated in the 1800s in the American novel “Sodiq Yakob” by Frederik Maryat. In the work, an image is evoked of a bull selling porcelain in a china shop, metaphorically describing a clumsy, inept, or blundering person.
- **A black sheep:** In English animal husbandry, most sheep are white—a fact attributable to the local climate. Thus, a black sheep in a flock was seen as a mark of disrepute, as the English associated a black sheep with a symbol of the devil. This expression is used to describe a person who is peculiar, different, or marginalized. It is worth noting that not all English phraseological units containing the word “sheep” denote naivety. For example, “as silly as a sheep” is used for a foolish person; “follow like sheep” means to follow blindly; and “to cast sheep’s eyes at somebody” means to look at someone with affection.

Conclusion. In a society where a particular language serves as the primary means of communication, prevailing socio-cultural factors shape the way people depict the world through language, forming powerful expressions such as phraseological units. In identifying the national-cultural characteristics

of phraseological units with zoonymic and phytonymic components, it is crucial to study them from an ethnocultural perspective and to examine their dynamic, diachronic evolution.

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