

The Pragmatic Potential and Discourse Functions of Phraseological Scripts

Usmanalieva Sabokhat

Independent Researcher, Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Abstract: *This article explores the multidimensional nature of formulaic language through the analytical lens of "phraseological scripts." Moving beyond static lexicographical classifications, the study unifies the structural-functional invariant model of A. V. Kunin and the conversational routine frameworks of A. P. Cowie with the cognitive schema theory pioneered by R. C. Schank and R. P. Abelson. Phraseological scripts are defined as complex, conventionalized cognitive-linguistic templates that operate as fixed situational networks designed to automatically manage standard social situations or specific rhetorical goals.*

The paper provides a dual-faceted investigation into the communicative properties of these units, focusing on their pragmatic potential and discourse functions. Leveraging contemporary pragmalinguistic principles, the author demonstrates that the pragmatic potential of a script represents its latent, internal capacity to project implicit evaluative orientations, manage intense emotive-expressive states, and exert authoritative illocutionary force. Conversely, its discourse functions represent its overt operational performance within active dialogue and continuous text production, categorized into structural-organizing, social-cohesive (phatic), stylistic-coherence, and intertextual-resonating roles.

Furthermore, drawing upon the linguocultural models of V. A. Maslova and the cultural scripts framework of C. Goddard and A. Wierzbicka, the study highlights the cognitive mechanisms of script activation as reflections of national mentality and collective social normativity. Finally, the interactional dynamics of these templates are analyzed through the processes of pragmatization and intentional occasional modifications, including phraseological insertion, truncation, contamination, and the literalization of imagery. The article concludes that the structural resilience and contextual adaptability of phraseological scripts make them fundamental pillars of communicative competence, necessitating a dynamic empirical approach in ongoing discourse and media analysis.

Keywords: *Phraseological script, Phraseological unit, Pragmatic potential, Discourse functions, Pragmalinguistics, Cognitive schema, Linguoculture, Cultural scripts, Pragmatization, Occasional modification.*

1. Introduction

Modern linguistic studies increasingly address the multidimensional nature of language as a dynamic tool of human interaction rather than a static system of abstract signs. Within this paradigm, phraseological units (PUs) are acknowledged as dense semantic and pragmatic phenomena[1]. They do not merely substitute individual words to avoid lexical gaps; rather, they organize, direct, and refine text and speech production[2]. When stable word combinations form fixed cognitive-situational networks, they operate as phraseological scripts.

The concept of a "script" is deeply rooted in cognitive science and artificial intelligence research, originally defined by R. C. Schank and R. P. Abelson as a conceptual structure that details an appropriate sequence of events in a particular context. When integrated into modern linguistics, a script manifests as a formulaic, stereotypic sequence of linguistic signs that individuals project to navigate social, cultural, and contextual interactions smoothly[3]. In phraseology, scripts regulate communicative actions, providing speakers with stereotypic templates that embody collective experience and institutionalized memory.

This paper investigates the dual dimensions of these structures: their pragmatic potential and their discourse functions[4]. While pragmatic potential refers to the internal latent capacity of a phraseological script to exert psychological or illocutionary influence, express a speaker's implicit attitude, or trigger a specific emotive response, discourse functions designate the overt textual, structural, and dialogic roles these scripts perform inside an ongoing communicative exchange. By bridging classical phraseological theories such as A. V. Kunin's functional-structural model with the communicative-pragmatic frameworks established by Sh. Safarov and the cross-linguistic cognitive perspectives of D. Dobrovolskij and E. Piirainen, this paper offers a multi-tiered analysis of how formulaic language controls human discourse[5].

2. Methodology

THE CONCEPTUAL EVOLUTION OF THE PHRASEOLOGICAL SCRIPT

To define the phraseological script, it is necessary to trace the trajectory of formulaic language from purely structural classifications to cognitive and communicative typologies. Early structural phraseology divided word groups based entirely on their degree of cohesive stability and semantic analyzability, drawing a line between free phrases and unmodifiable phraseological unities. Similarly, V. V. Vinogradov structured the field around the tripartite division of phraseological combinations, unities, and fusions based on semantic motivation.

However, these traditional taxonomies frequently isolated phraseology inside dictionaries, ignoring the dynamic, sequential nature of live language. A. V. Kunin expanded this view by focusing on the functional aspect of phraseology, looking at phraseological units as structural-functional invariants that contain a predefined "program" of performance in text and speech. In parallel, Western linguistics, represented heavily by A. P. Cowie, highlighted the existence of "sentence-like" recurrent expressions and stereotyped idioms that do not simply label concepts but actively manage interactions.

The turning point occurs when phraseological stability meets cognitive schema theory. According to Schank and Abelson, human understanding relies on pre-recorded episodic packages (scripts) that tell an individual what to expect and how to act in routine situations (entering a restaurant, attending a lecture). Linguistically, these situational programs are coded through specific, recurring chains of phraseological expressions. Consequently, a phraseological script can be defined as *a complex, conventionalized cognitive-linguistic template consisting of a single PU or an interconnected web of formulaic expressions, designed to automatically manage a standard social situation or rhetorical goal*.

These scripts operate as cultural shortcuts. As D. Dobrovolskij notes, idioms and figurative phrases are often conventional units whose imagery depends on cultural, historical, or metaphorical knowledge structures.

When a speaker activates a phraseological script, they are not generating novel syntax; they are activating a shared socio-cultural micro-world that is pre-packaged with specific values, assumptions, and interactional rules.

3. Results

THE PRAGMATIC POTENTIAL OF PHRASEOLOGICAL SCRIPTS

The pragmatic potential of any linguistic unit involves its capacity to produce an illocutionary effect that aligns with the speaker's communicative intentions while simultaneously altering the receiver's mental space or behavior. In phraseology, this potential is dramatically magnified due to the inherent asymmetry of the phraseological sign. Phraseological scripts do not communicate plain information; they carry a multi-layered semantic structure that incorporates evaluation, emotional expressiveness, and imagery[6].

Sh. Safarov emphasizes that pragmatic meaning is deeply rooted in the interplay between semantics and the social context of the speech act. When a phraseological script is deployed, its pragmatic potential manifests across three primary vectors:

1. **Evaluative and Axiological Orientation:** PUs are rarely neutral. They embed societal values, defining actions or states as universally positive or negative. The pragmatic force lies in the fact that the evaluation is implicit and structurally built-in, making it harder for the listener to challenge. For instance, deploying the script “*to burn the midnight oil*” goes beyond describing late-night work; it carries an inherent societal validation of industriousness and dedication[7].
2. **Emotive-Expressive Intensity:** Unlike free syntactic combinations, scripts tap into pre-existing emotional attitudes. They convey a condensed psychological state (irony, contempt, admiration), allowing the speaker to instantly telegraph their subjective alignment. For example, instead of stating that an endeavor is risky, using the script “*to skate on thin ice*” immediately communicates an intensified psychological state of urgency and imminent danger.
3. **Illocutionary Directing Force:** Many phraseological scripts serve as specialized tools for execution, performing specific speech acts (warning, consoling, dismissing) with intensified sociolinguistic authority. For instance, conversational scripts such as “*bite your tongue!*” act as stylized speech acts that execute commands far more authoritatively than literal directives[8].

The pragmatic potential of these scripts relies heavily on their "inner form" (внутренняя форма) and metaphorical motivation. The vivid imagery underlying a script provokes secondary reflection, forcing the interlocutor to process the cognitive overlap between the literal source domain and the figurative target domain. This structural complexity generates an affective resonance that free, literal language cannot replicate.

DISCOURSE FUNCTIONS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL SCRIPTS

While pragmatic potential evaluates the inner strategic capability of a script, discourse functions focus on its actual operation within text and talk. Discourse, defined as language in action within specific social settings, requires continuous tracking, structural management, and relational alignment. Phraseological scripts perform crucial structural and communicative-tactical roles within this space.

Drawing upon the functional paradigms of Kunin and Cowie, we can isolate four foundational discourse functions executed by phraseological scripts:

A. The Structural-Organizing Function

Scripts are frequently used as discourse markers or transitional templates that organize the progression of talk. They serve to mark topic shifts, initiate dialogic turns, or signal the approaching conclusion of an exchange. For instance, gambits and conversational templates like “*to make a long story short*” or “*on the other hand*” act as structural signposts. They guide the listener through the cognitive architecture of the narrative, establishing coherent logical boundaries within the discourse[9].

B. The Social-Cohesive (Phatic) Function

A massive sub-class of phraseological scripts includes formulaic routines designed to establish, maintain, or repair social equilibrium. These are termed “pragmatic phrasemes” or “speech formulas” by Cowie. Scripts for greeting, leave-taking, apologizing, or expressing sympathy (“*break a leg*”, “*many happy returns*”) rely on absolute structural reproducibility. Their discourse purpose is not to pass on novel propositional truth, but to reaffirm a shared social bond and satisfy interpersonal politeness requirements.

C. The Stylistic-Coherence Function

In continuous text production, phraseological scripts reinforce stylistic unity. As A. V. Kunin discusses, phraseological units within a text frequently build connections with other lexical items, establishing a specialized stylistic context known as a *phraseological configuration*. By embedding these stable complexes, an author locks a text into a particular register (colloquial, official, poetic,

journalistic), maintaining aesthetic and stylistic rhythm throughout the discourse. For example, introducing “*to kick the bucket*” instantly anchors the ongoing text inside a highly informal, colloquial register, constraining subsequent lexical choices[10].

D. The Intertextual and Resonating Function

Because phraseological scripts belong to the collective cultural repository, their use introduces an ancestral voice into individual speech. This creates an immediate intertextual link. When a script is uttered, it evokes a historical chain of identical usages, introducing cultural authority, national mythology, or shared literary memory directly into the current speech situation. For instance, referencing “*a Trojan horse*” instantly draws upon classical mythology, superimposing a deep historical layer of subversion and deception onto contemporary discourse[11].

COGNITIVE MECHANISMS AND LINGUOCULTURAL SCRIPT ACTIVATION

The deployment of a phraseological script is not merely a linguistic choice; it is a cognitive event requiring the activation of extensive background knowledge. According to V. A. Maslova, phraseological systems function as the primary repository for national-cultural mentality. PUs act as “cultural myths” or condensed archetypes, retaining the historical traces of a people's lifestyle, religious views, and social struggles.

This cultural dimension is explained systematically through the theory of Cultural Scripts, championed by Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka. Cultural scripts represent widely shared tacit assumptions about how to think, speak, act, and interpret behavior within a specific linguistic community. These scripts are constructed using universal semantic primes, ensuring cross-cultural intelligibility while preserving distinct cultural profiles[12].

When a phraseological unit is embedded within a speech act, it triggers a specialized linguocultural script. This cognitive alignment ensures that phraseological scripts function as highly efficient tools of social management. Because they rely on shared, culturally institutionalized scripts, they bypass the need for extensive description, transferring complex situational expectations and ethical judgments instantaneously. **INTERACTIONAL DYNAMICS:**

4. Discussion

PRAGMATIZATION AND MODIFICATION

A critical area of inquiry involves the dynamic behavior of phraseological scripts when they are introduced into live, unpredictable speech environments. Although scripts are structurally fixed as invariants within the language system, their actual usage reveals a fascinating tension between conventional constraint and contextual creativity.

Pragmatization occurs when a phraseological unit shifts along the functional continuum, moving away from purely nominative duties toward purely communicative and interactive duties. A nominative phraseological unit simply names an external reality (*a skeleton in the closet* names a hidden scandalous secret). However, during pragmatization, the unit undergoes a semantic bleaching of its literal parts, transforming into a pure discourse operator or conversational script. The primary focus shifts entirely to regulating the immediate interaction, managing speaker-hearer faces, or asserting conversational authority[13].

The true pragmatic power of a script is paradoxically visible when a speaker deliberately *breaks* or *modifies* it. Because these templates are deeply etched into the audience's cognitive map, any intentional variation creates a sharp stylistic disruption, amplifying the emotional or ironic weight of the utterance [14].

As Cowie demonstrates, authors frequently employ several types of occasional modifications:

1. **Phraseological Insertion:** Introducing external lexical items into the fixed chain to narrow down or satirize the script's focus.

2. **Clipped Form (Truncation):** Dropping the latter half of a well-known script (uttering only "*When in Rome...*"), relying fully on the listener's cognitive script to automatically supply the unsaid segment ("*...do as the Romans do*").
3. **Contamination / Blending:** Melding two separate phraseological scripts together to generate comedic effect, irony, or deep conceptual conflict.
4. **Deconstruction of Imagery (Literalization):** Forcing the literal meaning of a script's components to clash directly with its figurative meaning inside the same discourse space.

When a script is transformed occasionally, its pragmatic potential expands dramatically. The modification forces the receiver to abandon automated cognitive processing. They must consciously decode the gap between the conventional, expected script and the altered, contextual reality, resulting in heightened aesthetic and psychological impact [15].

5. Conclusion

The investigation conducted throughout this study demonstrates that phraseological scripts are far more than ornamental linguistic devices or static lexical substitutes. They are sophisticated, multi-tiered cognitive-linguistic programs that play a vital role in organizing and refining human discourse.

By unifying the cognitive foundations of Schank and Abelson with the deep structural-functional models of Kunin and Cowie, we can view these scripts as highly efficient operational models. The pragmatic potential of a phraseological script provides it with the latent power to project evaluation, express intense emotion, and direct illocutionary intent implicitly, shielding the speaker's underlying biases from direct challenge. Simultaneously, their discourse functions ensure structural fluidity, maintain social harmony through phatic routines, enforce register coherence, and build rich intertextual networks across texts.

Furthermore, the cross-linguistic and cognitive perspectives of Wierzbicka, Goddard, and Maslova highlight that phraseological scripts function as the primary guardians of cultural memory and social normativity. When an individual speaks via a phraseological script, they are reinforcing a shared socio-cultural micro-world. Ultimately, the survival and continuous adaptation of these units through contextual modifications and pragmatization confirm their status as irreplaceable pillars of communicative competence. For future linguistic inquiries, the study of phraseological scripts must continue to look past basic lexicographical categorization, focusing instead on real-time empirical analysis within media text, digital interaction, and intercultural dialogue.

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