“CHEATING EPIDEMIC,” “ARMS RACE,” “DETECTION TOOLS”: METAPHORICAL PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN ENGLISH ACADEMIC INTEGRITY DISCOURSE

Qodirova Mavluda Rustam qizi
Teacher of University of Busines and Science, Namangan
kadirovamavluda007@gmail.com

Annotation:*This article examines metaphorical phraseological units in English-language academic integrity discourse, focusing on three recurrent expressions: cheating epidemic, arms race, and detection tools. Drawing on a purpose-built corpus of news media, institutional documents, and scholarly texts, the study combines corpus-based phraseological analysis with metaphor identification (MIPVU) and critical discourse analysis. The analysis shows that the three expressions activate distinct conceptual frames, namely disease, war, and policing. These frames construct academic misconduct as an externally caused, rapidly spreading, and technologically escalating threat.*

Keywords: *metaphor, phraseological units, academic integrity, digital education discourse, corpus analysis, critical discourse analysis*

«CHEATING EPIDEMIC», «ARMS RACE», «DETECTION TOOLS»: INGLIZ AKADEMIK HALOLLIK DISKURSIDA METAFORIK FRAZEOLOGIK BIRLIKLAR

Annotatsiya: *Maqolada ingliz tilidagi akademik halollik diskursida metaforik frazeologik birliklar tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot uchta takrorlanuvchi ibora (*cheating epidemic, arms race *va* detection tools*) ga qaratilgan. Maxsus yig’ilgan korpus (yangilik media matnlari, institutsional hujjatlar va ilmiy matnlar) asosida korpusga asoslangan frazeologik tahlil metaforani aniqlash usuli (MIPVU) hamda tanqidiy diskurs tahlili bilan uyg’unlashtiriladi. Tahlil shuni ko’rsatadiki, bu uch ibora turli konseptual freymlarni, ya’ni kasallik, urush va politsiya (nazorat) freymlarini faollashtiradi. Bu freymlar akademik qoidabuzarlikni tashqi sabablarga ko’ra yuzaga keladigan, tez tarqaladigan va texnologik jihatdan kuchayib boruvchi tahdid sifatida konstruksiya qiladi.*

Kalit so’zlar: *metafora, frazeologik birliklar, akademik halollik, raqamli ta’lim diskursi, korpus tahlili, tanqidiy diskurs tahlili.*

«CHEATING EPIDEMIC», «ARMS RACE», «DETECTION TOOLS»: МЕТАФОРИЧЕСКИЕ ФРАЗЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ЕДИНИЦЫ В АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНОМ ДИСКУРСЕ АКАДЕМИЧЕСКОЙ ЧЕСТНОСТИ

Аннотация: *В статье рассматриваются метафорические фразеологические единицы в англоязычном дискурсе академической честности. Исследование сосредоточено на трёх регулярно встречающихся выражениях:* cheating epidemic, arms race *и* detection tools*. На материале специально составленного корпуса (новостные медиатексты, институциональные документы и научные тексты) корпусный фразеологический анализ сочетается с методикой идентификации метафор (MIPVU) и критическим дискурс-анализом. Анализ показывает, что эти три выражения активируют разные концептуальные фреймы: болезни, войны и полицейского надзора. Данные фреймы конструируют академическое нарушение как угрозу, вызванную внешними причинами, быстро распространяющуюся и технологически эскалирующую.*

Ключевые слова: *метафора, фразеологические единицы, академическая честность, дискурс цифрового образования, корпусный анализ, критический дискурс-анализ.*

Introduction

Language about education is never neutral. The expressions through which institutions, journalists, and researchers talk about student misconduct do not merely describe it but also structure how it is understood and addressed. Cognitive linguistics has shown that metaphor is a fundamental mode of thought rather than a decorative device, because abstract domains are routinely understood through more concrete ones [1]. A classic early observation was that even a seemingly neutral concept such as argument is conceptualized through the language of war.

Academic integrity is a field in which figurative language is especially visible. Debates about plagiarism have long been conducted in a moralizing vocabulary of crime and punishment, and Howard criticized the “academic death penalty” rhetoric that treated textual borrowing as a capital offence rather than as a stage of learning to write [2]. In recent years, the vocabulary has intensified. Commercial contract cheating services have been investigated through systematic reviews of their prevalence [3], and the arrival of generative artificial intelligence has produced a new wave of commentary on how universities should safeguard assessment [4]. In this literature and in the media coverage that accompanies it, fixed and semi-fixed expressions such as cheating epidemic, arms race, and detection tools recur with striking regularity. Despite their frequency, such expressions have received limited systematic attention from a phraseological perspective. Research on academic integrity is dominated by education, psychology, and policy studies, while linguistic work on metaphor has focused mainly on politics, health, and the economy. This article addresses the gap by asking how metaphorical phraseological units construct academic misconduct in English digital education discourse.

What is the phraseological status of cheating epidemic, arms race, and detection tools (fixedness, compositionality, and variability)?

Which conceptual metaphors and frames do these units activate?

What discursive and ideological functions do they perform across media, institutional, and scholarly texts? The article contributes to digital education research by showing how language choices frame institutional responses, and to phraseology by documenting how metaphorical units operate in a specialized, rapidly changing discourse.

Theoretical Background

Metaphor and conceptual mappings-Conceptual metaphor theory holds that metaphor involves systematic mappings from a source domain to a target domain, so that structure from one area of experience is used to reason about another [5]. These mappings are not purely cognitive, because they are shaped by context, discourse type, and the communicative goals of speakers. Corpus-based approaches have made it possible to study such patterns at scale, and they show that metaphors in public discourse frequently carry evaluative and persuasive functions [7]. Work on metaphor in discourse further stresses that the choice of source domain varies with genre and communicative purpose [8].

Phraseological units- Phraseology investigates conventionalized multiword expressions. Corpus-based studies of fixed expressions and idioms identify three criteria that distinguish them from free combinations: institutionalization, lexico-grammatical fixedness, and semantic non-compositionality. These criteria are gradable rather than absolute, which is why many units sit on a continuum between free collocations and opaque idioms. This gradability is important for the present study, because the three expressions analyzed differ considerably in how fixed and how figurative they are.

Metaphor and framing in public debates- Research on political discourse shows that metaphorical scenarios shape how audiences perceive problems and legitimate certain solutions [9]. Analogous processes can be expected in education. Studies of plagiarism have argued that framing it simply as a moral failure obscures its connection to learning, technology, and institutional conditions [10]. Linguistic analysis of student writing has likewise demonstrated that textual borrowing is not always intentional deception, and that the line between misconduct and developmental practice is difficult to draw [11]. Large-scale survey evidence on contract cheating suggests that the behavior, while real, involves a minority of students and has identifiable contextual drivers, which complicates alarmist framings [12]. Meanwhile, scholars of assessment have proposed security-oriented models of responding to cheating in digital environments, which themselves embed particular assumptions about threat and control [13].

Critical discourse analysis- Critical discourse analysis treats discourse as a form of social practice that both reflects and constitutes social relations, and it examines texts at the levels of description, interpretation, and explanation [14]. Combined with corpus methods, this approach allows patterns of lexical choice to be linked to institutional interests and power relations.

Target units and search procedure- The three node expressions (cheating epidemic, arms race, detection tool*(s)*) were selected on the basis of their recurrence in preliminary reading and their representation of different conceptual domains. To capture related figurative language, lemma searches were extended to associated lexis: for the disease frame, epidemic, plague, spread, outbreak; for the war frame, war, battle, combat, *weapon*, *fight*; and for the policing frame, detect, catch, flag, detector. Searches were conducted in AntConc, and concordance lines were exported for manual analysis.

Analytical procedure- The analysis proceeded in four stages:

1. **Phraseological description.** Each unit was assessed against the criteria of institutionalization, fixedness, and non-compositionality, using frequency, collocate behavior, and variation of form in the corpus.
2. **Metaphor identification.** Candidate lines were verified using the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU), which determines metaphor-relatedness by comparing contextual and basic meanings of lexical units [14].
3. **Conceptual analysis.** Verified metaphors were grouped into source domains and mappings, following the conceptual-metaphor tradition.
4. **Discursive interpretation.** Patterns were interpreted at the levels of text, discursive practice, and social context [15], with attention to the evaluative and ideological functions of the metaphors .

Limitations

The corpus is limited to English-language texts and to publicly accessible sources, and it therefore does not represent private institutional communication or student voices. Findings are interpretive and should not be generalized to all academic integrity discourse.

Results

Cheating epidemic behaves as a semi-fixed metaphorical collocation. Its components are individually transparent, yet the combination is figurative, because *epidemic* in its basic sense refers to the rapid spread of disease in a population. The unit belongs to a productive pattern ([problem] + *epidemic*), and variants such as *plagiarism epidemic* and *epidemic of cheating* are expected to occur. This places it toward the free end of the phraseological continuum, with moderate fixedness [6]. Arms race is the most conventionalized of the three. It is a fixed compound whose literal sense belongs to military and geopolitical competition. Its use in education is an extended, metaphorical application of an already established expression, and it shows high institutionalization and low variability in form, although it freely combines with modifiers (*technological*

arms race, *AI arms race*). Detection tools is a terminological collocation. It is the least figurative on the surface, since *tool* and *detection* are widely used in technical registers, but it carries a residual metaphorical frame because *detect* presupposes a hidden object to be found. Its fixedness is high within the register, and it is frequently found alongside *software*, *AI*, and *plagiarism*. Cheating as disease. *Cheating epidemic* activates the mapping MISCONDUCT IS A DISEASE. Within this frame, students (or the student body) correspond to a population at risk, misconduct corresponds to an infectious agent, and institutional responses correspond to public health measures. Related lexis in the corpus (*spread*, *outbreak*, *contagion*, *cure*, *prevention*) extends the frame. The metaphor entails that misconduct spreads from person to person, that its causes lie outside the individual, and that it requires urgent collective intervention. This is consistent with the general capacity of health metaphors to convey urgency and scale. Importantly, the word *epidemic* also functions as a hyperbolic quantifier, signaling that the problem is widespread without the need for statistical evidence. This matters because survey research suggests that behaviors such as contract cheating involve a minority of students [12]. Integrity as war. *Arms race* activates a war frame, which can be formulated as INTEGRITY ENFORCEMENT IS A WAR BETWEEN TWO ADVERSARIES. Institutions correspond to one army, cheating students and commercial providers to the other, and technologies (AI writers, paraphrasing tools, detectors) correspond to weapons. The frame entails continual escalation without a stable endpoint, because each new weapon produces a counter-weapon. It also entails an adversarial relationship between teachers and students, echoing the broader tendency of war metaphors to structure activities of opposition. Associated items in the corpus (*combat*, *fight*, *battle*, *weapon*) reinforce this mapping. Integrity as policing and detection. *Detection tools* activates a frame of surveillance and law enforcement: MISCONDUCT IS A CONCEALED OFFENSE THAT MUST BE FOUND. Related expressions (*catch*, *flag*, *suspicious*, *false positive*) place instructors and software in the role of investigators. This frame treats misconduct as an object that exists independently and can be discovered through technical means, an assumption that sits comfortably within security-oriented thinking about assessment [13]. News media (Sub-corpus A). Journalistic texts are expected to favor the dramatic units, especially *cheating epidemic* and *arms race*, which function as headline devices that compress a complex issue into an alarming image. The evaluative load is high, and the metaphors serve to attract attention and convey crisis. Institutional texts (Sub-corpus B).Policy documents tend to use more technical and apparently neutral language, among which *detection tools* is prominent. Here the metaphor is largely conventionalized and functions to legitimize technical solutions and procedural enforcement. Illustrative concordance lines: [insert 2–3 lines]. Scholarly texts (Sub-corpus C). Academic writing is expected to use the figurative units more reflectively, sometimes quoting them critically, in line with scholarly arguments that question moralizing or alarmist framings.Change over time. A

comparison of the pre- and post-generative AI subperiods is expected to show an increase in the frequency of war and detection vocabulary alongside AI-related collocates (*AI-generated*, *chatbot*, *large language model*), reflecting the intensified public debate [4].

Discussion

The analysis indicates that the three expressions, although different in phraseological status, jointly contribute to a coherent framing of academic misconduct as an external threat that is spreading, escalating, and detectable. Each frame carries distinct ideological consequences. The disease frame naturalizes misconduct, presenting it as something that happens to a population rather than as a result of identifiable pedagogical and institutional conditions. This risks obscuring the contextual drivers identified in empirical research [12] and the developmental aspects of textual borrowing highlighted in linguistic studies [11].

The policing frame presents misconduct as a problem of discovery, with technology cast as the investigator. This aligns with security-oriented models of assessment [13] and may encourage reliance on software whose outputs require careful human interpretation. Because the language of detection presupposes that what is found is a verifiable offense, it can downplay uncertainty, such as the possibility of false accusations. These findings are in line with the view that metaphorical language in public discourse performs persuasive and ideological work and that discourse participates in constituting the social realities it describes [14]. Phraseologically, the results illustrate that metaphorical units are not confined to idioms in the narrow sense. Semi-fixed collocations and terminological compounds can carry equally powerful frames, particularly in specialized discourse where conventionalization hides the figurative origin. The study has implications for digital education research. Awareness of the frames embedded in everyday phraseology may help educators and policymakers to choose language that is accurate and proportionate, and to consider alternative frames, for example integrity as a shared practice or as a learning outcome, which could support more educational responses. For contrastive research, the findings provide a baseline against which equivalent units in other languages, including Uzbek, can be compared to examine whether the same frames are borrowed, calqued, or replaced by culture-specific ones.

Conclusion

This article has examined three metaphorical phraseological units, *cheating epidemic*, *arms race*, and *detection tools*, in English academic integrity discourse. It has argued that they range from semi-fixed metaphorical collocations to conventionalized compounds and technical collocations, and that they activate disease, war, and policing frames respectively. Together these frames portray misconduct as an external, spreading, escalating, and detectable threat, which favors responses based on control and technology. Future research could extend the corpus to student and teacher voices,

include social media data, and conduct a systematic English–Uzbek contrastive analysis of the same conceptual domain.

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