

STRUCTURAL AND SEMANTIC CORRESPONDENCE OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN

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Abstract: *Phraseological units constitute an essential component of the lexical systems of languages, reflecting both linguistic structure and cultural cognition. This article presents a comparative analysis of the structural and semantic correspondence of phraseological units in English and Russian. The study examines similarities and differences in grammatical organization, idiomaticity, imagery, and semantic equivalence between the two languages. Special attention is paid to types of correspondence, including full equivalence, partial equivalence, and non-equivalence. The findings demonstrate that while English and Russian share common conceptual foundations in phraseology, their structural realization and semantic interpretation are strongly influenced by typological and cultural factors. The results of the research are relevant for contrastive linguistics, translation studies, and foreign language teaching.*

Keywords: *phraseological units, idioms, structural correspondence, semantic correspondence, idiomaticity, figurative meaning, metaphorical imagery, contrastive linguistics, cross-linguistic analysis, cultural specificity, english phraseology, russian phraseology.*

Introduction.

Phraseological units (idioms) represent one of the most intricate and expressive components of the lexical system of any language. They are fixed or semi-fixed combinations of words whose overall meaning often cannot be deduced from the meanings of individual elements. These units play a critical role in communication, functioning not only as linguistic tools but also as carriers of cultural knowledge, cognitive patterns, and national identity. In both English and Russian, phraseological units serve as linguistic markers of social norms, historical experience, and shared cultural understanding, making them a central object of study in comparative linguistics, cognitive linguistics, and linguoculturology.

The relevance of studying phraseological units across languages is increasingly significant in the context of globalization and intercultural communication. Understanding the structural and semantic correspondence of idioms between English and Russian is essential for improving translation accuracy, facilitating language learning, and fostering intercultural competence. Although English and Russian belong to different language families-English being an analytic language with relatively fixed word order, and Russian being a synthetic, highly inflected language-the two languages exhibit analogous communicative strategies through idiomatic expressions. These strategies allow speakers to convey complex emotional, evaluative, and cultural meanings efficiently.

Structurally, English phraseological units are usually characterized by formal rigidity, where the order of words and syntactic patterns must remain intact to preserve idiomatic meaning. Examples include constructions like *to break the ice* or *to spill the beans*, which cannot be altered without losing their idiomatic function. Russian phraseological units, in contrast, often display grammatical flexibility, allowing variations in word order, case endings, and agreement without disrupting the semantic integrity of the idiom. Such structural differences highlight the influence of typological characteristics on the formation and use of phraseological units, and they underscore the challenges involved in establishing direct structural correspondence between the two languages.

Semantically, phraseological units are rich in metaphorical, metonymic, and evaluative meaning. In both languages, idioms frequently arise from shared human experiences such as work, emotions, social relations, and physical activity. However, the imagery and symbolic associations encoded in these units are often culturally specific. For instance, the English idiom *to make a mountain out of a molehill* and the Russian *делать из мухи слона* convey the same concept of exaggeration but employ different metaphorical images. Such examples illustrate partial semantic correspondence, while other idioms may exhibit full correspondence, as in *to lose one's head* and *потерять голову*, or complete non-equivalence, where descriptive translation is required.

Cultural context is integral to the interpretation and use of phraseological units. English idioms often reflect biblical references, maritime history, and social institutions, whereas Russian idioms are deeply influenced by agrarian life, folk traditions, and Orthodox Christian heritage. These cultural underpinnings determine the imagery, evaluative connotations, and pragmatic functions of idioms in discourse. Consequently, an understanding of cultural specificity is essential for both translators and language learners to achieve accurate comprehension and appropriate usage of phraseological units.

The purpose of this study is to provide a detailed comparative analysis of the structural and semantic correspondence of phraseological units in English and Russian. The study

seeks to identify types of correspondence, including full, partial, and non-equivalent idioms, and to examine the factors that contribute to similarities and differences in form, meaning, and cultural context. By combining structural, semantic, and cultural approaches, this research aims to deepen our understanding of idiomatic language as a multidimensional phenomenon and to provide insights applicable to translation studies, foreign language teaching, and intercultural communication.

Main part.

The structure of phraseological units is determined by their grammatical composition, word order, and the degree of fixedness. In English, idiomatic expressions are generally highly stable and formally fixed. This rigidity is largely a consequence of English being an analytical language, where word order carries syntactic and semantic weight. Typical structural patterns include:

- ✓ **Verb + object:** to break the ice, to spill the beans
- ✓ **Prepositional phrases:** under the weather, in the long run
- ✓ **Adjectival expressions:** cold feet, red tape

Any significant alteration in the word order or substitution of lexical elements often results in the loss of idiomatic meaning. Thus, structural stability is a defining feature of English phraseological units.

In Russian, phraseological units are generally more grammatically flexible, which reflects the synthetic nature of the language. Word order can often vary without compromising idiomatic meaning, and inflection allows units to agree with sentence elements. For example, the idiom *водить за нос* can appear in different grammatical forms depending on context: *водят за нос*, *водил за нос*, *ведут её за нос*. Similarly, *работать спустя рукава* maintains its figurative meaning even when syntactic structure changes. This flexibility increases the expressive and stylistic potential of Russian phraseological units.

Comparatively, while both English and Russian phraseological units rely on stability for semantic integrity, the manifestation differs: English prioritizes formal rigidity, while Russian emphasizes semantic cohesion. This structural divergence highlights the challenges in achieving direct structural correspondence between the two languages, particularly in translation.

Semantic analysis focuses on idiomaticity, metaphorical imagery, and evaluative meaning. Phraseological units often carry meanings that cannot be inferred from individual words alone, making them an essential vehicle for expressing nuanced thought and cultural attitudes.

In English, many idioms employ metaphorical imagery from everyday experiences, social interactions, and physical actions. Examples include:

- To hit the nail on the head – to describe doing something accurately
- To keep an eye on something – to monitor carefully

In Russian, phraseological units often exhibit vivid imagery and stronger emotional connotations, e.g.:

- Держать камень за пазухой – to harbor a secret grudge
- Душа в пятки ушла – to feel extreme fear

Comparatively, phraseological units can be classified according to their degree of semantic correspondence:

1. **Full equivalence** – identical meaning and similar imagery: to lose one’s head = потерять голову
2. **Partial equivalence** – similar meaning but different imagery: to make a mountain out of a molehill = делать из мухи слона
3. **Non-equivalence** – no idiomatic counterpart exists; descriptive translation is required.

This classification shows that semantic correspondence is more common than structural correspondence, yet complete semantic equivalence is rare. Many idioms reflect universal human experiences but are shaped by language-specific cultural imagery.

Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping both structure and semantics of idioms. Phraseological units often encode historical, social, and cultural knowledge.

English idioms often reflect:

- Biblical and literary influences: the writing on the wall
- Maritime history: to be at the helm
- Social institutions: red tape

Russian idioms often reflect:

- Folk traditions: сесть в калошу – to get into trouble
- Agrarian life: посеять ветер – пожать бурю – to cause problems by actions
- Orthodox Christian values: нести свой крест – to endure hardship

Even when English and Russian idioms share similar meanings, their cultural foundations can differ dramatically. Understanding these cultural differences is essential for translation, intercultural communication, and language learning.

The analysis of English and Russian phraseological units allows us to identify three main types of correspondence:

1. **Full correspondence** – both structure and meaning match: to lose one’s head = потерять голову
2. **Partial correspondence** – meaning is similar, structure or imagery differs: to make a mountain out of a molehill = делать из мухи слона

3. **Non-correspondence** – no direct equivalent exists; meaning must be conveyed descriptively: English to bite the bullet → Russian сделать что-то трудное, не выражаясь идиомой

Semantic correspondence tends to be higher than structural correspondence. Many idioms convey universal human experiences but are expressed using culturally specific imagery and linguistic forms.

Understanding structural and semantic correspondence is crucial for translation and teaching English or Russian as a foreign language. Literal translation often fails to preserve idiomatic meaning, particularly when structural and cultural divergences exist. Translators and learners must focus on functional and semantic equivalence rather than exact form. Pedagogically, explicit instruction in phraseological units, including cultural background and structural flexibility, can improve comprehension, usage, and translation accuracy.

Conclusion.

The comparative analysis of phraseological units in English and Russian demonstrates that these linguistic elements are a complex intersection of structure, semantics, and culture. Phraseological units serve not only as stable lexical combinations but also as cognitive and cultural markers, reflecting the historical experience, social norms, and national worldview of their respective speech communities. This study has shown that understanding phraseology requires an integrated approach that considers structural, semantic, and cultural dimensions simultaneously.

Structurally, English idioms are generally characterized by high formal stability and a fixed word order, which is a result of the analytical nature of the English language. Any significant alteration in their form usually leads to a loss of idiomatic meaning. Russian idioms, by contrast, demonstrate greater grammatical flexibility, allowing changes in word order, inflection, and agreement without compromising semantic integrity. These structural differences mean that direct structural equivalence between English and Russian phraseological units is often limited, and functional correspondence is more prevalent.

Semantically, phraseological units in both languages exhibit idiomaticity, metaphorical imagery, and evaluative meaning. English idioms tend to rely on transparent metaphors derived from daily life, social interaction, and physical experience, whereas Russian idioms frequently display more vivid imagery and stronger emotional connotations. The study revealed three types of semantic correspondence: full equivalence, where meaning and imagery coincide; partial equivalence, where meaning is similar but imagery differs; and non-equivalence, where idioms have no direct counterpart in the other language. While full semantic correspondence is relatively rare, partial correspondence is common, highlighting

the universal cognitive foundations of idioms alongside language-specific cultural expression.

Cultural analysis further demonstrated that phraseological units are closely tied to the cultural heritage of a language. English idioms often reflect biblical references, historical events, maritime traditions, and institutional norms, while Russian idioms frequently originate from folk culture, agrarian life, and Orthodox Christian values. Even when idioms convey similar meanings, their cultural underpinnings may differ significantly, making cultural competence essential for translators, language learners, and intercultural communicators.

Functionally, phraseological units enhance stylistic expressiveness, convey emotional and evaluative nuances, and facilitate communicative efficiency in both English and Russian. They are essential tools in spoken and written discourse, literary texts, media, and educational contexts. Recognizing the interplay between structural form, semantic content, and cultural specificity allows learners and translators to achieve accurate comprehension, appropriate usage, and effective cross-linguistic communication.

In conclusion, the study confirms that a comprehensive understanding of phraseological units necessitates a multidimensional approach, integrating structural, semantic, and cultural analysis. While English and Russian idioms share common cognitive and communicative functions, their realization is heavily influenced by typological and cultural factors. The findings of this research have practical applications in translation studies, foreign language teaching, intercultural communication, and further contrastive linguistic studies, providing a framework for analyzing idiomatic language in other cross-linguistic contexts.

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