

THE FUNCTIONING OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS WITH
ETHNOGRAPHIC COMPONENTS IN FICTION

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Abstract: This article deals with the functional analysis of ethnographic components of phraseological units. Phraseological units are an essential aspect of language, comprising idioms, proverbs, and expressions that convey cultural and linguistic meanings. An investigation of phraseological units is one of the urgent problems of modern linguistics. Since phraseology as a science emerged only in the early twentieth century, today there is still a lot of unresolved issues in this area.

Key words: phraseology. Phraseological units, culture, text, components

Phraseological units, those colorful idioms and fixed expressions that enrich our language, often carry the weight of culture and history. When these units contain ethnographic components – references to specific customs, beliefs, or experiences of a particular culture – they become powerful tools for communication and understanding.

Language is part of the culture of the nation - it preserves the culture and transmits it to other generations. S.G.Ter-Minasova calls a language the mirror of the surrounding world “... it [the language] reflects the reality and creates its own picture of the world, specific and unique to each language and, consequently, for the people, ethnic group, speech community, using the given language as a means of communication”.

Phraseology, according to V.A.Maslova, is a fragment of the linguistic world picture; it is employed to understand and evaluate the world rather than to describe it. V.A.Maslova suggests that phraseological units have a close relationship with native speakers' background knowledge, as well as their cultural and historical traditions. “Phraseology is the mirror where the human’s national and cultural identity is reflected”.

Literature, with its rich tapestry of language, often weaves in threads of culture, history, and tradition. Phraseological units – those colorful idioms and fixed expressions – are a key part of this cultural fabric. These units, often carrying strong ethnographic components, act as powerful tools for authors, enriching their narratives with depth, nuance, and a sense of place.

Phraseological units with ethnographic components are deeply rooted in a culture’s history, customs, beliefs, and experiences. They reflect a shared understanding of the world, often drawing on local folklore, mythology, and everyday life.

For example:

“To kick the bucket” (English): This phrase, signifying death, likely originates from the practice of using a bucket to hoist carcasses onto a cart. This historical reference adds a layer of depth and cultural context to the expression.

“To bite the bullet” (English): This phrase, implying facing a difficult situation bravely, stems from the practice of soldiers biting on a bullet during surgery before anesthesia.

“To have a bone to pick with someone” (English): This idiom, expressing a grievance, could stem from the practice of dogs fighting over bones, reflecting a deeper understanding of animal behavior.

Authors utilize phraseological units with ethnographic components to:

The use of culturally specific idioms creates a strong sense of place and time. A character using a phrase common in 19th-century England adds authenticity to the period setting.

A character’s choice of phraseology can reveal their background, education, and social status. A character using slang or colloquial expressions might be perceived as less educated or from a particular region.

Ethnographic phraseology can highlight cultural themes and values. A story featuring a character using a proverb reflecting a strong sense of family loyalty underscores the importance of tradition in that culture.

Phraseological units add layers of meaning and nuance to dialogue, making it more evocative and realistic. A character saying “it’s raining cats and dogs” conveys a sense of intensity and chaos that simple words cannot capture.

Examples used in literature

“Catch-22” by Joseph Heller: The novel uses a wealth of military slang and colloquialisms, immersing the reader in the world of wartime aviation. The phrase “to have a screw loose” reflects the realities of the chaotic environment.

“The Great Gatsby” by F. Scott Fitzgerald: Fitzgerald uses phrases like “to be a good sport” and “to be a flapper,” reflecting the specific language and social norms of the Roaring Twenties.

“A Suitable Boy” by Vikram Seth: The novel, set in India, uses Hindi and Urdu phrases, weaving in rich cultural elements that enrich the narrative.

Ethnographic components embedded within phraseological units add depth and nuance, going beyond simple literal meanings. Consider the English expression “to kick the bucket.” While it simply signifies death, its origins likely stem from the practice of using a bucket to hoist carcasses onto a cart, revealing a historical and cultural context.

Phraseological units with ethnographic components are powerful tools for communication. They offer a window into cultural history, reveal shared experiences,

and enrich our understanding of the world. By understanding and appreciating these units, we can navigate the complexities of language and forge stronger connections across cultures.

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