



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Xolmurodova Mohichehra Alimardon qizi

Master's student of the Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Abstract: *Phraseological units (PUs) are multi-word units that represent significant elements of language proficiency. These include idiomatic expressions, collocations, and proverbs. Despite their importance in language fluency, they present substantial challenges for foreign language learners, mainly due to their non-literal meanings and cultural specificity. This study investigates the significance of phraseological units in foreign language learning, focusing on their role in developing communicative competence and enhancing linguistic fluency. Through an analysis of current literature and teaching practices, the paper highlights the cognitive, cultural, and educational importance of mastering phraseological units. The results show that systematic teaching of PUs can enhance learners' comprehension and production abilities, making their speech more natural and contextually appropriate.*

Keywords: *Phraseological units, foreign language learning, idioms, collocations, proverbs, communicative competence, fluency, cultural awareness, formulaic language, lexical competence.*

In the context of foreign language acquisition, communicative competence is a key component that extends beyond grammatical accuracy to include pragmatic knowledge of how language is used in real-world contexts. One of the most effective ways to build communicative competence is through mastering phraseological units (PUs) — groups of words that convey specific meanings, often non-literal or figurative. PUs are central to fluent language use, as they allow speakers to express ideas more naturally and efficiently [Wray, 2002].

However, many learners encounter difficulties with PUs because their meaning often cannot be deduced from the individual words. PUs, such as idiomatic expressions (“kick the bucket”), collocations (“make a decision”), and proverbs (“Actions speak louder than words”), are not only linguistically challenging but also culturally specific [A. P. Cowie, 19982]. Thus, understanding and using PUs correctly requires learners to navigate both the formal structure and the cultural context in which these units are used [Lewis, 1993].

This paper explores the significance of phraseological units in foreign language learning, highlighting their role in fostering fluency, cultural awareness, and communicative competence. The study also presents strategies for integrating PUs into language teaching curricula.

Phraseological units have long been the subject of linguistic study, with numerous scholars addressing their nature and role in language. According to Wray PUs are



considered formulaic language and represent a crucial aspect of fluent communication [J. Sinclair, 1991]. These units are stored in the brain as single entities, allowing for more efficient language processing and production [Wray, 2002]. Furthermore, research by Moon demonstrates that PUs contribute significantly to native-like fluency and natural language use [Moon, 1998].

In foreign language teaching, the role of PUs is often underemphasized, despite their centrality to fluency. Bachman and Lewis argue that language learners need to be familiar with collocations and idiomatic expressions to be fully competent communicators [Bachman, 1990;]. This highlights the gap between learners' grammatical competence and their ability to use language effectively in real-life situations. However, mastering PUs remains a challenge, as learners often fail to acquire them due to a lack of exposure and insufficient teaching focus.

The research adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach to explore the significance of phraseological units in foreign language learning. The data were gathered through the following methods:

Literature Review: A comprehensive review of existing studies, books, and articles related to PUs in language learning.

Classroom Observations: Observations from foreign language classrooms where the teaching of phraseological units was a focus.

Analysis of Teaching Materials: Evaluation of foreign language textbooks and other teaching materials to assess the integration of PUs.

Survey of Language Teachers: A survey of foreign language teachers to understand the role of PUs in language instruction and the challenges they face when teaching them.

Phraseological units are indispensable in developing communicative competence. Learners who master PUs demonstrate greater fluency and are able to understand authentic materials such as movies, books, and real-life conversations with more ease. These learners are more likely to speak naturally and be understood by native speakers.

Many PUs reflect cultural values and worldview. For example, proverbs and idioms often express shared knowledge and traditions, helping learners to better understand the culture behind the language. By learning PUs, students not only improve their language skills but also gain insight into the cultural nuances that shape language use.

The use of PUs enables learners to speak more fluently and with greater ease. Idiomatic expressions and fixed collocations are frequently used by native speakers in everyday communication, and their use by learners results in more natural-sounding speech. Mastering these expressions also facilitates quicker thinking and fewer hesitations during conversation.

Despite their benefits, PUs present various challenges. Learners often struggle with:

Literal Interpretation: Many PUs cannot be understood based on the meaning of individual words, leading to confusion or incorrect usage.



Contextual Appropriateness: Learners may use PUs inappropriately due to a lack of understanding of the contexts in which they are used.

Interference from Native Language: Learners may apply PUs from their own language directly to the foreign language, which can lead to errors.

The findings emphasize the crucial role of phraseological units in language learning. While grammar and vocabulary are essential, fluency and communicative competence cannot be achieved without a solid understanding of PUs. As noted by Lewis, PUs are the building blocks of fluent language use, and learners who do not acquire them may struggle to achieve native-like proficiency [Lewis 1993].

Effective teaching strategies include:

Contextual Learning: Exposing learners to PUs through authentic materials such as movies, songs, and news articles.

Task-Based Learning: Incorporating PUs into speaking and writing tasks that simulate real-world communication.

Corpus-Based Approaches: Using language corpora to identify the most common and useful PUs for learners at various proficiency levels.

Cultural Integration: Teaching learners the cultural context of PUs to help them understand when and why they are used.

Phraseological units are a vital aspect of foreign language learning, contributing significantly to communicative competence, fluency, and cultural understanding. The systematic teaching of PUs can greatly enhance learners' ability to use language in natural and culturally appropriate ways. Therefore, language instructors should prioritize the inclusion of PUs in their curricula to help students achieve higher levels of proficiency.

Future research should focus on empirical studies to evaluate the effectiveness of different teaching methods for PUs and further investigate the cognitive processes involved in learning these multi-word units.

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