

THE LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN DEVELOPING WORD FORMATION IN ENGLISH

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Introduction

Phraseological units (PUs) are combinations of words that function as single lexical items, often with meanings that cannot be deduced from the individual words they contain. Commonly referred to as idiomatic expressions or fixed phrases, these units are a crucial aspect of language, especially in English, where they contribute significantly to the richness and versatility of communication. Examples of phraseological units include expressions like "a piece of cake" (meaning something easy) and "break the ice" (to initiate a conversation in a social setting).

In the context of word formation, phraseological units offer insight into how language evolves and how new words and expressions emerge. This article examines the linguistic features of phraseological units, focusing on their role in the development of word formation in English. We will explore how these units contribute to morphological processes, enrich lexical semantics, and influence the dynamics of word creation.

Methods

This study adopts a descriptive and qualitative approach to analyze phraseological units within the context of word formation in English. The data for this research was gathered from a range of contemporary sources, including dictionaries of idioms, corpus data, and examples from both written and spoken language.

A total of 100 commonly used phraseological units were selected, with a focus on identifying those that have undergone a process of word formation, such as conversion, compounding, or blending. These units were categorized based on the following criteria:

1. **Syntactic Structure:** Analyzing whether phraseological units are fixed in structure or allow for variations in their form.
2. **Morphological Processes:** Examining how these units contribute to the creation of new words or derivatives.
3. **Semantic Shifts:** Investigating how the meanings of these units evolve or influence the formation of new lexical items.
4. **Pragmatic Usage:** Considering how context and social factors influence the use of these units and their potential role in coining new expressions.

Results

Syntactic and Morphological Features

The phraseological units analyzed reveal various ways in which they contribute to word formation processes in English. Some of the key findings include:

- **Compounding and Blending:** Certain phraseological units give rise to compound words or blended forms. For example, "hangover" (from "hang over") and "pickpocket" (from "pick pocket") demonstrate how phraseological units can be contracted or compounded to form new lexical items. Over time, these compounds often lose their connection to the original phrase and are treated as single words in everyday use.

- **Conversion:** Phraseological units also undergo a process of conversion, where a word in the phrase transforms its grammatical category. For example, the phrase "to catch someone red-handed" can be converted into the noun "red-handed" to describe a person caught in the act of committing a crime. This demonstrates how PUs contribute to the expansion of word forms in English, creating new adjectives, nouns, or verbs.

- **Acronyms and Initialisms:** Some phraseological units evolve into acronyms or initialisms, often leading to the development of new words. For instance, "laugh out loud" (LOL) has become a widely used acronym in digital communication. This process reflects how PUs adapt to contemporary modes of communication and facilitate word creation.

Semantic Features and Shifts

Phraseological units also play a significant role in shaping lexical semantics. Their meanings often extend beyond the literal interpretation of their individual components, resulting in shifts that are foundational to word formation.

- **Metaphorical Meaning:** Many phraseological units, such as "kick the bucket" (meaning "to die") and "the ball is in your court" (meaning "it's your turn to take action"), involve metaphorical meanings that evolve over time. The figurative use of language in PUs can lead to the creation of new words or expressions, such as "bucket list" (a list of things to do before one dies), which is derived from the phrase "kick the bucket."

- **Lexical Innovation:** PUs often generate new lexical items that reflect cultural or social changes. For example, the phrase "to google something" has transitioned from a specific reference to the search engine "Google" to a generalized verb meaning "to search online." This illustrates how phraseological units can drive the development of new words that reflect modern technological and cultural practices.

Pragmatic Usage and Social Context

The pragmatic aspect of phraseological units also plays a significant role in the development of new words. As social and cultural contexts evolve, certain

phraseological units become more widely used or gain new connotations, leading to the creation of novel expressions. For instance, expressions like "to binge-watch" (to watch multiple episodes of a show in one sitting) reflect a modern lifestyle and the increasing influence of digital media. This shows how phraseological units can reflect new social phenomena, leading to the coinage of new lexical forms that align with contemporary experiences.

Discussion

The linguistic features of phraseological units offer crucial insights into the dynamic nature of word formation in English. Phraseological units serve as rich sources for the creation of new words and expressions, driving the expansion of the lexicon in several ways:

1. **Morphological Flexibility:** Through processes like compounding, blending, and conversion, phraseological units contribute to the ongoing development of English word forms. These processes demonstrate the adaptability of language and how PUs can evolve into fully integrated lexical items.
2. **Semantic Expansion:** As PUs often involve metaphorical or figurative meanings, they are instrumental in broadening the semantic field of language. This allows for the creation of new words that capture complex ideas, experiences, and cultural phenomena.
3. **Cultural and Technological Influence:** The pragmatic use of phraseological units reflects shifts in society, technology, and communication. As new social trends emerge, PUs adapt, sometimes giving rise to entirely new lexical items, such as terms related to the digital age (e.g., "to google," "selfie").

The findings from this study highlight the role of phraseological units in the continuous evolution of the English language. They not only contribute to the creation of new words but also reflect the cultural and social dimensions that shape language over time.

Conclusion

Phraseological units are more than just fixed combinations of words; they are dynamic elements of language that play a vital role in the development of new words and expressions in English. Through morphological processes such as compounding, blending, and conversion, PUs contribute significantly to the lexicon and enrich the language. Additionally, their metaphorical meanings and adaptation to social and technological changes provide fertile ground for the creation of innovative lexical forms.

The study of phraseological units, therefore, offers valuable insights into how language evolves and how new words are formed. As language continues to adapt to changing cultural and technological landscapes, the role of phraseological units in word formation will undoubtedly remain an essential aspect of linguistic development.

References

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