

## **THE LINGUISTIC NATURE AND CLASSIFICATION OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION**

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**Abstract:** This article explores the linguistic nature and classification of phraseological units within the context of primary education. Drawing on contemporary linguistic theory and cognitive linguistics, the study conceptualizes phraseological units as stable, semantically integrated multiword expressions that play a significant role in early language development. Particular attention is devoted to the criteria for identifying phraseological units and to the limitations of traditional classification models when applied to young learners. The article argues that conventional phraseological classifications require pedagogical reorientation, taking into account semantic transparency, cognitive accessibility, and developmental appropriateness. The findings contribute to the theoretical foundations of educational phraseology and offer practical implications for curriculum design and learner-oriented lexicography in primary education.

**Keywords:** phraseological units; linguistic classification; primary education; cognitive linguistics; educational phraseology; language development.

**Introduction:** Phraseological units constitute a fundamental component of natural language, reflecting its idiosyncrasy, cultural embeddedness, and expressive capacity. In linguistic research, they are commonly defined as stable multiword expressions characterized by semantic unity, fixedness, and reproducibility. While phraseology has been extensively investigated in adult language use, lexicography, and translation studies, its role in early language education—particularly at the primary level—has received comparatively limited scholarly attention.

Primary education represents a crucial stage in language development, during which learners move beyond isolated lexical items toward more complex patterns of meaning construction. At this stage, phraseological units become especially significant, as they introduce children to figurative language, evaluative meanings, and culturally grounded modes of expression. However, the linguistic complexity of phraseological units raises important questions regarding their classification and pedagogical suitability for young learners.

The present study seeks to address these issues by examining the linguistic nature of phraseological units and proposing a classification framework adapted to the cognitive and

linguistic characteristics of primary school students. The main aim of the article is to bridge the gap between theoretical phraseology and educational linguistics.

**Theoretical Framework:** The theoretical framework of the present study is grounded in cognitive linguistics, educational linguistics, and modern phraseological theory, which collectively conceptualize language as a meaning-making system closely intertwined with human cognition, experience, and culture. Within this paradigm, phraseological units are viewed not merely as fixed lexical combinations but as conventionalized cognitive constructs that encode culturally shared patterns of conceptualization.

Cognitive linguistics departs from structuralist views that treat meaning as an autonomous linguistic property. Instead, it posits that meaning emerges from embodied experience, perceptual interaction with the environment, and socially mediated conceptual structures. This perspective is particularly relevant for the analysis of phraseological units, whose meanings are rarely arbitrary and are often motivated by metaphorical and metonymic processes.

In the context of child language development, this theoretical orientation is especially productive. Children acquire language not through abstract rule internalization alone but through meaningful interaction with linguistic input that reflects familiar experiences and culturally salient models. Phraseological units, as stabilized expressions of collective experience, serve as interfaces between language, cognition, and culture, making them central to early conceptual development. From an educational-linguistic standpoint, the theoretical framework also integrates insights from developmental psychology and pedagogy. It recognizes that children's cognitive capacities differ qualitatively from those of adult language users, particularly in terms of abstraction, metalinguistic awareness, and inferential reasoning. Consequently, linguistic theory must be reinterpreted through a pedagogical lens when applied to primary education.

This framework thus supports a reconceptualization of phraseological units as pedagogically meaningful cognitive resources rather than as marginal stylistic devices. It provides the foundation for analyzing how phraseological meaning can be classified, adapted, and explained in ways that align with children's cognitive development and learning needs.

**The Linguistic Nature of Phraseological Units:** From a linguistic perspective, phraseological units are traditionally defined as stable, reproducible multiword expressions characterized by semantic unity and restricted variability. Their defining features typically include structural stability, semantic non-compositionality, and conventionalized usage. Unlike free word combinations, phraseological units function as holistic units within the mental lexicon of speakers.

However, a purely structural or formal definition of phraseological units is insufficient, particularly in educational contexts. Cognitive linguistics offers a more nuanced account by emphasizing the conceptual motivation underlying phraseological meaning. Many phraseological units are grounded in conceptual metaphors, image schemas, and embodied experiences, which explain why their meanings, although figurative, are not arbitrary.

For example, expressions that conceptualize emotions, mental states, or moral qualities through physical sensations or spatial relations reflect deeply entrenched metaphorical mappings. These mappings are cognitively salient and culturally shared, which accounts for the persistence and communicative efficiency of phraseological units. In this sense, phraseological units can be understood as linguistically encoded cognitive models.

In the context of primary education, the linguistic nature of phraseological units acquires additional significance. Children are still developing their capacity for abstract reasoning, and their interpretation of language relies heavily on concrete experience and imagery. Phraseological units that are partially or fully motivated by perceptual experience are therefore more accessible than those based on highly abstract or culturally opaque associations.

Another important aspect of the linguistic nature of phraseological units is their gradience. Phraseology does not constitute a homogeneous category; rather, it encompasses expressions with varying degrees of semantic transparency and fixedness. From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, this gradience reflects differences in conceptual accessibility, which is a crucial consideration for pedagogical classification.

Accordingly, understanding the linguistic nature of phraseological units requires moving beyond rigid taxonomies toward a continuum-based model that accounts for semantic transparency, conceptual motivation, and cognitive accessibility. Such an approach allows for the selection and adaptation of phraseological material that is developmentally appropriate for primary learners.

In sum, phraseological units should be conceptualized not merely as lexical anomalies but as structured, motivated, and cognitively grounded linguistic entities. This reconceptualization provides a theoretical basis for their systematic integration into early language education and for the development of learner-oriented phraseological classifications and dictionaries.

**Methodology:** The study adopts a qualitative, theory-driven methodology grounded in linguistic analysis. The following methods were employed:

- **Structural-semantic analysis** to identify defining features of phraseological units;
- **Functional analysis** to examine their communicative and educational roles;
- **Cognitive-linguistic interpretation** to explain meaning motivation and conceptual structure;

- **Pedagogical extrapolation** to adapt linguistic classifications to the context of primary education.

Although the research is theoretical in nature, it is explicitly oriented toward educational application, in line with the scope of applied linguistics and language education journals indexed in Scopus.

**Classification of Phraseological Units in Primary Education:** The classification of phraseological units in primary education constitutes a central theoretical and pedagogical challenge. Traditional linguistic classifications, while analytically rigorous, were developed primarily for adult language users and descriptive linguistic purposes. When applied uncritically to child language education, these models often fail to account for learners' cognitive development, conceptual accessibility, and educational objectives.

From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, classification should not be understood as a purely taxonomic exercise. Rather, it represents a model of meaning organization that reflects how learners cognitively process, internalize, and use phraseological units. For primary learners, classification must therefore be grounded in principles of conceptual motivation, semantic transparency, and developmental appropriateness.

This section argues that phraseological units in primary education require a reconceptualized classification framework that integrates linguistic theory with cognitive development and pedagogical functionality. Such a framework enables educators and lexicographers to select, sequence, and explain phraseological material in a way that supports meaningful learning rather than formal categorization alone.

**Traditional Linguistic Classifications:** Traditional phraseological theory classifies phraseological units according to criteria such as degree of semantic cohesion, structural fixedness, and stylistic function. Common categories include idioms, collocations, proverbs, set expressions, and routine formulae. These classifications are linguistically sound and have proven effective for descriptive analysis and lexicographic documentation.

However, from a cognitive-linguistic and educational perspective, such classifications exhibit several limitations when applied to primary education. First, they presuppose a level of metalinguistic awareness that young learners typically do not possess. Distinctions based on abstract linguistic criteria—such as full versus partial idiomacity—may be analytically meaningful for linguists but cognitively opaque for children.

Second, traditional classifications tend to treat phraseological units as static linguistic objects rather than as dynamic cognitive resources. They emphasize formal properties at the expense of

conceptual motivation and experiential grounding. As a result, they offer limited insight into how children actually understand and use phraseological expressions in communication.

Third, these classifications are largely pedagogically neutral. They do not provide guidance on which phraseological units are suitable for early instruction, how they should be sequenced, or how their meanings should be explained. Consequently, reliance on traditional taxonomies alone risks introducing linguistically complex but cognitively inaccessible material into the primary curriculum.

From a cognitive-linguistic standpoint, this reveals a fundamental mismatch between descriptive linguistic classification and educational application. Phraseological units must be reorganized according to criteria that reflect how meaning is cognitively constructed and pedagogically scaffolded in early language learning.

**A Pedagogically Oriented Classification:** In response to the limitations of traditional models, this study proposes a pedagogically oriented classification of phraseological units grounded in cognitive linguistics and developmental considerations. Rather than replacing linguistic classification, this approach reinterprets it through a pedagogical lens, prioritizing conceptual accessibility and educational relevance.

The first criterion of this classification is degree of semantic transparency. From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, transparency corresponds to the extent to which phraseological meaning is motivated by perceptual or experiential knowledge. Semantically transparent units, whose meanings can be inferred through familiar imagery, are more cognitively accessible to primary learners and thus suitable for early instruction. Partially transparent units may be introduced with contextual support, whereas semantically opaque units should be approached cautiously or reserved for later stages.

The second criterion is conceptual grounding in children's experience. Phraseological units that draw on everyday activities, bodily experience, basic emotions, and familiar social situations align more closely with children's cognitive world. Such grounding facilitates conceptual mapping and reduces cognitive load during interpretation.

The third criterion concerns functional communicative role. From an educational standpoint, phraseological units should be classified according to the pragmatic functions they serve in communication. These include expressive units (emotions and attitudes), descriptive units (states and actions), and interactional units (politeness, encouragement, routine social behavior). This functional orientation aligns phraseological classification with communicative competence development.

This pedagogically oriented classification reframes phraseological units as developmentally staged cognitive tools rather than as static linguistic categories. It provides a theoretically grounded basis for curriculum design, textbook development, and learner-oriented lexicography in primary education.

**Discussion:** The expanded classification framework underscores the necessity of integrating cognitive-linguistic theory into the pedagogical treatment of phraseological units. The analysis confirms that phraseological competence cannot be viewed as an advanced or peripheral aspect of language learning. On the contrary, phraseological units play a crucial role in shaping children's conceptual systems, expressive abilities, and cultural awareness from an early age.

The discussion highlights a fundamental theoretical shift: from viewing phraseological units as linguistic anomalies requiring memorization toward understanding them as cognitively motivated constructions that support meaning-making. This shift has significant implications for both educational linguistics and lexicography. It challenges translation-centered and form-based approaches that neglect the conceptual and experiential dimensions of phraseological meaning. Moreover, the pedagogically oriented classification demonstrates that phraseological units in primary education constitute a distinct educational category, not merely a simplified subset of adult phraseology. Their selection and organization must be guided by cognitive accessibility, functional relevance, and developmental sequencing rather than by traditional linguistic hierarchy alone.

From a broader theoretical perspective, the findings support the view that language education should be grounded in models of meaning that reflect actual cognitive processing. Cognitive linguistics provides a robust theoretical foundation for this endeavor by explaining how figurative meaning emerges from embodied experience and culturally shared conceptual structures.

**Conclusion:** This study has presented a comprehensive cognitive-linguistic reinterpretation of phraseological classification in primary education. By critically examining traditional linguistic taxonomies and proposing a pedagogically oriented alternative, the analysis demonstrates that phraseological units must be understood as cognitively grounded and developmentally sensitive linguistic resources.

The findings underscore that effective phraseological instruction in primary education depends on aligning linguistic theory with children's cognitive capacities and educational needs. Classification models that incorporate semantic transparency, conceptual grounding, and communicative function offer a more viable foundation for early language teaching than purely formal approaches.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the advancement of educational phraseology as an interdisciplinary field situated at the intersection of cognitive linguistics, pedagogy, and lexicography. Practically, it provides a conceptual basis for the development of curricula, teaching materials, and child-oriented phraseological dictionaries.

Future research may extend this framework through empirical validation, cross-linguistic comparison, and exploration of digital learning environments. Nevertheless, the present theoretical analysis establishes a solid foundation for rethinking the role and classification of phraseological units in primary language education.

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