BG Pulse Journal USA
ISSN:1947-2536 http://www.bgpulseusa.com/index.php/bg

THE NATIONAL AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE

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Doi: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21840518

Abstract: This article examines the national and cultural characteristics of phraseological units in the Russian language. Phraseological expressions are an important part of the lexical system because they reflect the historical experience, traditions, beliefs, values, and worldview of the Russian people. Unlike ordinary word combinations, phraseological units usually possess figurative meanings that cannot be fully understood through the meanings of their individual components. The study focuses on expressions connected with everyday life, religion, folklore, customs, natural phenomena, and traditional social relations.

Russian language, phraseological units, phraseology, national culture, cultural identity, linguistic worldview, traditions.

Key words:

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматриваются национальные и культурные особенности фразеологических единиц русского языка. Фразеологические выражения являются важной частью лексической системы, поскольку они отражают исторический опыт, традиции, верования, ценности и мировоззрение русского народа. В отличие от обычных словосочетаний, фразеологические единицы обычно обладают переносными значениями, которые не могут быть полностью поняты через значения их отдельных компонентов. Исследование сосредоточено на выражениях, связанных с повседневной жизнью, религией, фольклором, обычаями, природными явлениями и традиционными социальными отношениями.

Ключевые слова: русский язык, фразеологические единицы, фразеология, национальная культура, культурная идентичность, языковое мировоззрение, традиции.

Introduction

Phraseological units constitute one of the most expressive and culturally significant layers of the Russian language. They are stable combinations of words whose overall meaning is often figurative and cannot always be understood from the literal meanings of their individual components. Expressions such as *бить баклуши* (to be idle), *как снег на голову* (completely unexpectedly), *держать камень за пазухой* (to hold a secret grudge), and *семь пятниц на неделе* (to change one's decisions frequently) illustrate how Russian phraseology expresses complex situations through vivid and memorable images.

The study of phraseological units is important because they do not merely name actions, qualities, emotions, or situations. They also preserve information about the historical development, traditional lifestyle, social relationships, religious beliefs, customs, and collective experience of the

Russian people. Many Russian idioms originated from agriculture, handicrafts, trade, military life, Orthodox Christianity, folklore, traditional food, and observations of nature. Consequently, their meanings are closely connected with the material and spiritual culture in which they were formed.

The national and cultural character of a phraseological unit is usually revealed through its figurative basis. For example, the expression *печь как блины* literally refers to making pancakes quickly and repeatedly. Its figurative use is connected with the importance of pancakes in Russian traditional culture and describes the rapid production of something in large quantities. Similarly, the phraseological unit *после дождичка в четверг* refers to an event that is unlikely to happen. The unusual image contained in this expression reflects traditional beliefs and historical interpretations that may not be immediately clear to speakers from another cultural background.

Literature Review

The relationship between Russian phraseology and national culture is comprehensively examined in V. N. Telia's work *Russian Phraseology: Semantic, Pragmatic and Linguocultural Aspects*. Telia approaches phraseological units not only as stable linguistic combinations but also as culturally meaningful signs. Her study pays particular attention to the denotative and connotative components of phraseological meaning, including evaluation, imagery, emotion, motivation, and stylistic colouring [1]. The work presents phraseological units as signs that may function as compact cultural "microtexts," because their figurative structures contain information about social experience, cultural symbols, and collective values.

According to Telia's linguocultural approach, the meaning of a phraseological unit includes more than a description of a particular action or situation. It may also express the speaker's emotional attitude and a culturally established evaluation. For example, the expression *выносить сор из избы* literally describes carrying rubbish out of a house. Figuratively, it means revealing private family problems or conflicts to outsiders. The cultural image of the house as a protected family space plays a central role in the formation of this meaning. The idiom therefore communicates a traditional social rule according to which internal family matters should not become public.

Telia's approach makes it possible to analyse cultural connotation as an essential element of phraseological meaning. The connotation may be positive, negative, ironic, humorous, or disapproving. For example, *золотые руки* expresses admiration for a skilled person, while *медвежья услуга* negatively describes help that causes harm. These evaluations are not accidental additions to the meanings of the expressions. They are established through repeated use within a particular linguistic and cultural community.

Telia also emphasizes the role of figurative motivation. Many phraseological units remain understandable because speakers can connect their figurative meaning with a familiar cultural image. The expression *плыть против течения*, for instance, is based on the physical difficulty of moving against the direction of water. In its figurative use, it describes resistance to dominant opinions, social expectations, or circumstances. The natural image becomes a cultural model for interpreting human behaviour.

An important contribution of Telia's work is the idea that phraseology participates in the construction of a linguistic worldview. Russian speakers use culturally established images to categorize people, emotions, actions, and social situations. Body parts, animals, food, clothing, household objects, natural phenomena, and religious symbols frequently serve as sources of phraseological imagery. Consequently, Russian phraseology demonstrates how speakers interpret reality through culturally familiar associations.

The historical and ethnocultural origins of Russian phraseological imagery are examined in V. M. Mokienko's *Images of Russian Speech: Historical and Etymological Essays on Phraseology*. Mokienko analyses the formation and development of Russian expressions by connecting their meanings with historical events, folk customs, traditional occupations, everyday objects, and elements of material and spiritual culture [2]. His historical-etymological approach demonstrates that many expressions become unclear when the realities that motivated them disappear from everyday life.

Research Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative and descriptive research design to investigate the national and cultural characteristics of phraseological units in the Russian language. This approach was selected because the cultural content of phraseological expressions cannot be adequately explained through statistical data alone. Phraseological meaning is closely connected with imagery, historical background, national traditions, emotional evaluation, social experience, and the communicative context in which an expression is used.

Several complementary methods were applied during the research.

The descriptive method was used to identify the structural, semantic, and stylistic characteristics of the selected phraseological units. According to N. M. Shansky, phraseological units are reproducible and relatively stable combinations that function as complete linguistic units rather than as freely constructed word groups [3]. Following this approach, each selected expression was examined as a unified semantic structure.

For example, the expression *сидеть сложа руки* has a stable lexical structure and means "to remain inactive" rather than literally "to sit with folded hands." Its meaning is reproduced by speakers as a complete unit. The expression also contains a negative evaluation of passivity and unwillingness to work.

Semantic analysis was used to compare the literal meanings of the components with the figurative meaning of the entire phraseological unit. This method made it possible to identify the semantic transformation that occurs when an ordinary word combination becomes an idiomatic expression.

For instance, the literal meaning of *золотые руки* is "hands made of gold." However, its phraseological meaning is "an individual who is highly skilled in practical work." The adjective *золотой* does not describe the material of the hands. It symbolizes value, excellence, usefulness, and admiration.

Similarly, the expression *каша в голове* does not refer to actual food. It describes a confused mental condition in which a person cannot organize thoughts clearly. The culturally familiar image of mixed porridge is metaphorically transferred to intellectual confusion.

The linguocultural method was central to the study. It was used to determine how Russian phraseological units reflect cultural values, historical experience, social norms, and collective representations. V. A. Maslova explains that linguoculturology studies the relationship between language and culture, particularly the way cultural meanings are preserved and expressed through linguistic signs [4].

From this perspective, a phraseological unit was examined not only as a lexical expression but also as a carrier of cultural information. The analysis considered:

- the cultural image underlying the expression;
- the traditional practice connected with it;
- the values expressed through the phraseological unit;

- its positive or negative evaluation;
- its role in the Russian linguistic worldview.

For example, *выносить сор из избы* means revealing private family conflicts or problems to outsiders. The cultural meaning of the expression is based on the image of the home as a protected family space. The phraseological unit reflects the traditional idea that internal family affairs should not be publicly discussed.

Historical and etymological analysis was applied to identify the possible origins of phraseological images. Many Russian expressions were formed in historical periods when social conditions, occupations, tools, beliefs, and customs differed significantly from those of contemporary society.

The analysis considered whether a phraseological unit was connected with:

- traditional crafts;
- agricultural work;
- ancient household practices;
- Orthodox Christian culture;
- Russian folklore;
- historical personalities or periods;
- traditional forms of entertainment;
- obsolete objects and lexical units.

This method is important because contemporary speakers may understand the figurative meaning of an expression without knowing its original cultural motivation. The historical interpretation of phraseology helps reconstruct the cultural conditions under which the expression emerged.

Contextual analysis was used to examine how phraseological units function in different types of Russian discourse. The selected expressions were considered in everyday, literary, publicistic, and educational contexts.

The same phraseological unit may perform different pragmatic functions depending on the speaker's intention. It may express admiration, criticism, irony, humour, disappointment, surprise, or emotional support. For example:

У этого мастера золотые руки.

In this context, *золотые руки* communicates admiration and a positive evaluation.

Он снова сидит сложа руки, пока остальные работают.

Here, *сидеть сложа руки* expresses criticism and dissatisfaction.

The context therefore influences the emotional force and communicative function of a phraseological expression.

The cultural-background method was employed to identify information that members of Russian-speaking culture may understand implicitly. E. M. Vereshchagin and V. G. Kostomarov emphasize that successful language comprehension requires knowledge of the cultural background associated with words and expressions.

Analysis and Results

The analysis revealed that Russian phraseological units preserve cultural information through their imagery, internal form, symbolic components, historical associations, and evaluative meanings. Five major national-cultural domains were identified:

1. traditional work and everyday life;
2. food and hospitality;
3. folklore and historical memory;

4. religion and moral values;
5. nature, animals, and social behaviour.

A significant group of Russian phraseological units is connected with work, household activities, and traditional occupations. These expressions reflect the importance of labour in Russian social and cultural experience.

The phraseological unit *работать засучив рукава* means to work actively, energetically, and seriously. The image is based on the practical action of rolling up one's sleeves before beginning physical work. In Russian culture, this expression communicates approval of diligence and readiness to perform a difficult task.

Its semantic opposite is *работать спустя рукава*, which means to work carelessly or without sufficient effort. Long, loose sleeves traditionally made physical work difficult when they were not rolled up. In modern Russian, the expression is no longer directly connected with clothing. It functions as a negative evaluation of irresponsible work.

The opposition between these expressions demonstrates how phraseology communicates cultural attitudes towards labour:

работать засучив рукава — diligence and responsibility;

работать спустя рукава — carelessness and irresponsibility[5].

Another example is *сидеть сложа руки*. Its literal image represents a person whose hands are inactive. Figuratively, it describes someone who takes no action while action is expected. The phraseological unit expresses a negative attitude towards passivity.

The expression *золотые руки*, in contrast, describes a person who is highly skilled and capable of producing or repairing things. The component *золотой* symbolizes high value and exceptional quality. The expression demonstrates the cultural respect traditionally given to practical ability and craftsmanship.

The analysis showed that labour-related phraseological units commonly perform an evaluative function. They divide human behaviour into culturally approved and disapproved categories. Diligence, skill, responsibility, and persistence are positively evaluated, whereas laziness, carelessness, and passivity are criticized.

The expression *блудный сын* refers to a person who leaves family or community and later returns. Although its origin is biblical, it is commonly used outside religious discourse.

The phraseological unit *запретный плод* describes something attractive precisely because it is forbidden. The expression reflects the biblical narrative of forbidden fruit but has become a general metaphor for temptation.

The analysis showed that religious phraseological units preserve moral ideas related to suffering, temptation, forgiveness, return, hope, and unexpected salvation. Even in secular contexts, they retain elements of their original symbolic and evaluative meanings.

Their cultural significance lies in the fact that they connect contemporary communication with texts and moral narratives that have influenced Russian culture for centuries.

Волчий аппетит describes an extremely strong appetite. The wolf is culturally associated with hunger and voracious eating. The phraseological meaning intensifies the ordinary concept of hunger.

The expression *считать ворон* describes a person who is distracted and fails to pay attention to an important activity. Observing crows symbolizes aimlessness and lack of concentration.

The phraseological unit *как рыба в воде* describes a person who feels completely comfortable and confident in a particular environment. The natural relationship between fish and water becomes a metaphor for social or professional competence.

For example:

В новой школе она чувствует себя как рыба в воде.

The expression means that she feels natural and confident in the new environment.

The analysis demonstrated that animal-based expressions reflect culturally established observations and stereotypes. Animals are associated with particular qualities:

Animal image	**Associated quality**	**Phraseological example**
Bear	strength and clumsiness	*медвежья услуга*
Wolf	hunger and aggression	*волчий аппетит*
Crow	distraction or difference	*считать ворон; белая ворона*
Fish	comfort in a natural environment	*как рыба в воде*
Fox	cunning and deception	*хитрый как лиса*

The analysis also revealed that national-cultural phraseological units create difficulties in translation. Literal translation may preserve individual words but fail to communicate the actual meaning.

For example, the literal translation of *когда рак на горе свистнет* is “when a crayfish whistles on the mountain.” Without cultural and contextual explanation, the target-language reader may not understand that it means “never” or “at an impossible future time.”

Similarly, *выносить сор из избы* cannot be translated only as “to take rubbish out of the house,” because its intended meaning concerns the disclosure of private conflicts.

Three main translation strategies were identified:

1. using a complete phraseological equivalent;
2. using a functional or partial equivalent;
3. providing a descriptive translation[6].

A complete equivalent can be used when the target language contains an expression with similar meaning and imagery. A functional equivalent communicates the same idea through a different cultural image. A descriptive translation explains the meaning when no appropriate idiomatic equivalent exists.

The analysis confirms the argument that linguistic competence alone is not sufficient for understanding culturally marked phraseology. The interpreter or translator must possess cultural-background knowledge.

Finally, the analysis showed that Russian phraseology is both nationally specific and culturally dynamic. Some expressions contain distinctively Russian images, while others have biblical, European, Slavic, or international origins. However, their frequent use, grammatical adaptation, emotional colouring, and cultural interpretation within Russian discourse make them part of the Russian linguistic worldview.

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