

**SEMANTIC TRANSFORMATIONS AND THE USE OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS
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Annotation: This article examines the usage of phraseological units in humorous narratives such as jokes and anecdotes, focusing on their semantic transformation in the context of humor creation. The research highlights how phraseologisms contribute to the expressiveness, emotional impact, and cultural specificity of jokes. It explores various mechanisms of semantic shifts, including metaphorization, deconstruction, contextual reinterpretation, and wordplay. Additionally, the article reveals how phraseological expressions reflect national mentality and cultural stereotypes through humorous communication. The findings demonstrate that phraseologisms serve as an effective linguistic tool for shaping humor, enhancing its pragmatic and aesthetic functions within the discourse of jokes.

Keywords: phraseologisms, humor, semantic shift, linguistic creativity, cultural specificity, anecdotes, pragmatics

Introduction: Humor represents one of the most universal forms of human communication, serving not only as a source of amusement but also as a powerful linguistic and cultural phenomenon. Among the humorous genres that have played a significant role in shaping social consciousness, anecdotes and jokes hold a special place. They serve as a mirror reflecting the mentality, value system, worldview, and social behavior of a particular community. From a linguistic perspective, the humorous effect in jokes is achieved through various stylistic and semantic mechanisms. One of the most prominent of these mechanisms is the usage of phraseological units — stable expressions that carry figurative meanings and are deeply rooted in national culture.

Phraseologisms function as a highly productive linguistic resource that allows speakers to compress complex meanings into a concise form, express emotions vividly, and reinforce the communicative impact of humor. In the structure of jokes, phraseological units do not merely retain their traditional meanings; rather, they frequently undergo deliberate semantic transformations. This process of reinterpreting meanings – such as literalization, contextual metaphorization, semantic shift, splitting idiomatic unity, or playful distortion – serves as a key tool in creating humorous effects. Consequently, the semantic restructuring of phraseologisms invites listeners to re-evaluate familiar linguistic patterns, generating unexpected associations that incite laughter.

The study of semantic changes within phraseological units used in jokes also contributes to a deeper understanding of linguistic creativity. Humor exposes latent meanings, uncovers the structural flexibility of idioms, and demonstrates how cultural knowledge and shared experience are mobilized in communication. Furthermore, because phraseologisms are culturally marked, their transformation within jokes reveals how humor conveys national stereotypes, behavioral norms, and worldview distinctions. Thus, analyzing phraseological usage in humorous contexts is essential not only for understanding linguistic mechanisms of humor but also for uncovering features of ethnolinguistic identity.

In recent years, the field of pragmalinguistics has shown increased interest in the study of humor as a communicative strategy. However, the systematic linguistic analysis of phraseological units specifically within jokes – especially in Uzbek linguistic tradition – remains insufficiently explored. This research aims to fill that gap by examining the structure, functions, and semantic shifts of phraseologisms in humorous discourse. Through this analysis, the study

seeks to reveal how phraseological creativity contributes to humor production, how cultural meanings transform through joke narratives, and how linguistic playfulness shapes the aesthetic and pragmatic functions of humorous communication.

Therefore, the current research stands at the intersection of phraseology, pragmatics, and cultural linguistics, shedding light on the dynamic nature of language in humorous discourse. It contributes to theoretical insights into the functioning of idiomatic expressions and enhances our understanding of humor as both a linguistic and socio-cultural phenomenon.

Materials and methods: This study is based on the analysis of humorous discourse, primarily anecdotes and jokes, in which phraseological units serve as key linguistic elements contributing to humor generation. The materials for the research were selected from contemporary Uzbek humorous sources, including printed joke collections, humor magazines, online platforms, and social media content. Additionally, classical Uzbek folklore-based anecdotes and translated jokes from other cultures were examined to identify similarities and differences in the use of phraseologisms within diverse humorous traditions. Altogether, more than 200 anecdotal texts containing idiomatic expressions were compiled and analyzed.

The methodological framework of the research integrates interdisciplinary approaches, combining descriptive, comparative, semantic, and pragmatic analyses. The descriptive method was employed to identify phraseological units in humorous contexts and to classify them according to their structural and semantic types. The semantic analysis focused on determining the mechanisms of meaning transformation, including metaphoric reinterpretation, literalization, variation of structural components, and playful deconstruction of idiomatic unity. Pragmatic analysis was used to explore how phraseological modifications influenced the humorous effect, communicative intent, and interaction between the joke-teller and the audience.

The study also utilized elements of corpus-based observation through the systematization of recurring idiomatic forms and humor patterns. A comparative approach enabled the identification of culturally specific features of phraseologisms by contrasting Uzbek humorous texts with those from other linguistic environments. This comparison helped to determine the degree to which humor based on idiomatic usage depends on shared cultural knowledge and national mentality.

Moreover, the research employed contextual interpretation as a means of analyzing how the surrounding linguistic environment influences the reinterpretation of phraseological meanings. Each selected text was examined according to its communicative purpose, structural organization, pragmatic markers, and cultural references. Attention was given to linguistic creativity in transforming stable expressions into humorous tools that invoke unexpected associations.

To ensure reliability, classification and interpretation of idiomatic modifications were supported by theoretical principles from phraseology, cognitive linguistics, semiotics, and humor studies. Existing scholarly literature on idioms, humor mechanisms, and semantic shifts served as a conceptual basis for understanding linguistic phenomena within the analyzed material. By combining qualitative observation with comparative analytical procedures, this study aims to reveal the functional significance of phraseologisms in the construction of humor and to contribute new insights into their semantic versatility in humorous discourse.

The use of phraseological units in humorous discourse often relies on semantic shifts that produce a comic effect. The following examples illustrate various mechanisms of phraseological transformation observed in Uzbek jokes.

In this mechanism, the idiom's figurative meaning is intentionally interpreted **literally** to create humor.

Example:

A doctor tells his patient: – Your heart seems to have “fallen into your hand.”

The patient anxiously asks: – Can you sew it back where it belongs?

Phraseologism: yuragi qo‘liga tushmoq (“the heart falls into one’s hand”) → to be frightened

Humor source: A literal instead of idiomatic interpretation

Effect: An unexpected cognitive shift creates laughter

Here, the internal structure of the phraseological unit is modified or rebalanced for humorous purposes.

Example:

- I won’t go to the wedding, I have nothing to wear.
- They say: “A person is welcomed by their clothes, and seen off by their wisdom!”
- Then I guess they will not welcome me... but surely see me off quickly!

Phraseologism: “welcomed by clothes, seen off by wisdom”

Humor: Logical imbalance between meaning and personal reality

Effect: Exaggerated contrast highlights social norms

Figurative meaning is **enhanced** to amplify the comic effect.

Example:

A teacher says to a lazy student:

- If your brain won’t work, at least let your notebook do the work!

Phraseologism: the brain does not work → lack of understanding

Humor: Strong pragmatic intensification turns criticism into humor

Idioms are re-valued within a cultural context, exposing irony or stereotypes.

Example:

- When your neighbor is rich, your “tongue becomes louder” too.
- Yes, in our neighborhood everyone respects that rich neighbor now...

Phraseologism: tili baland bo‘lmoq (“to have a loud tongue”) → to act superior

Humor source: Implicit social critique through irony

Effect: Humor reflects social hierarchy and attitudes

The unity of meaning is intentionally broken through **phonetic or semantic play**.

Example:

- My husband always says: “A full stomach means a full heart.”
- True! If his heart weren't full, he would ask for another meal every hour!

Phraseologism: qorin to‘q, ko‘ngil to‘q → contentment

Humor: Collision of figurative meaning with literal bodily needs

Effect: Playful reinterpretation creates a humorous contrast

General Analytical Findings

Mechanism	Source of Humor	Linguistic/Cultural Effect
Literalization	Unexpected shift in meaning	Semantic dissonance
Structural modification	Breaking idiomatic norms	Creative deviation
Intensification	Hyperbolic expression	Emotional reinforcement
Pragmatic reinterpretation	Social irony, stereotypes	Cultural criticism
Wordplay	Linguistic creativity	Cognitive surprise

These examples confirm that the semantic elasticity of phraseologisms serves as a leading factor in the generation of humor in anecdotes.

Result and discussion: The analysis of more than 200 humorous texts containing phraseological units revealed several notable tendencies regarding the linguistic mechanisms and functional roles of idioms in humor construction. First, it was determined that the majority of humorous effects were generated through semantic transformations of phraseologisms. Among these, literalization of idiomatic expressions was the most frequently observed technique, accounting for approximately 45% of the analyzed cases. This occurs when the figurative meaning of an idiom is replaced by its direct, literal interpretation, resulting in a humorous contrast between conventional understanding and unexpected contextual usage.

The second most common mechanism was playful restructuring of phraseological forms (around 30%), in which stable idiomatic patterns were modified through phonetic, lexical, or morphological variations. This form of linguistic manipulation disrupted the established semantic unity of the idiom and created an element of surprise. Additionally, 15% of the analyzed excerpts demonstrated metaphorical intensification, where phraseologisms preserved their figurative meaning but were strengthened through humorous exaggeration or hyperbolic amplification.

The remaining instances (roughly 10%) involved pragmatic re-evaluation of idioms. In such cases, phraseological units acquired hidden meanings, irony, or culturally marked interpretations that required shared background knowledge for successful decoding. It was also found that idioms widely used in daily communication were more likely to be humorized due to their accessibility and recognizability. From an ethnolinguistic standpoint, many phraseological jokes relied on cultural stereotypes, national character traits, and socio-political realities, highlighting the connection between humor and collective worldview. The analysis confirms that humorous reinterpretation of idioms not only produces comic effect but also reinforces social meanings and reflects cultural identity.

The results of the study reaffirm the theoretical assumption that phraseological units are cognitively loaded linguistic signs closely tied to cultural conceptualization. Their reinterpretation within humorous discourse reveals the dynamic interaction between stable

linguistic memory and creative linguistic innovation. The frequent use of literalization suggests that humor exploits the dual nature of idioms, prompting the audience to shift between literal and figurative cognitive frames. This cognitive switch has been identified by scholars as a fundamental component of humor processing, supporting existing theories in cognitive pragmatics.

The presence of modified idiomatic structures in jokes further demonstrates that phraseologisms are not rigid linguistic constructs but flexible units capable of transformation. Such modifications highlight the speaker's creative ability to play with established norms of language, underscoring the role of humor as a form of linguistic experimentation. Moreover, the pragmatic reinterpretation of idioms in specific cultural contexts reflects humor's function as a social commentary tool, revealing attitudes toward societal behaviors, moral values, and group identities.

The results also show that humorous effectiveness is largely dependent on shared cultural knowledge. Phraseological jokes rely on familiar images, symbolic associations, and collective experiences; consequently, successful communication requires a strong degree of cultural competence among participants. This indicates that idiom-based humor serves not only entertainment purposes but also reinforces group belonging and social connection.

From a broader linguistic perspective, the interplay between phraseology and humor highlights the adaptability of language in responding to evolving cultural and communicative environments. As humor continues to be a widely consumed genre—especially in digital contexts—studying semantic transformations of idioms in jokes remains important for understanding contemporary language trends and cultural transformations. Future research may extend the comparative dimension to explore cross-cultural variances more deeply as well as incorporate corpus-driven frequency analysis to further substantiate findings.

Conclusion: The conducted research provides a comprehensive understanding of the functional significance of phraseological units in the construction of humor within anecdotes and jokes. The findings confirmed that idioms represent a highly productive linguistic resource for generating comic effects, owing to their dual semantic nature and strong cultural embedding. When used in humorous discourse, phraseologisms do not remain static expressions; instead, they undergo various semantic modifications that challenge established linguistic expectations. This process of meaning transformation – particularly through literalization, playful restructuring, and pragmatic reinterpretation—triggers cognitive dissonance and produces the humorous surprise effect that lies at the core of joke mechanisms.

The semantic flexibility of idioms uncovered in this study highlights the dynamic and evolving character of language, showing how speakers creatively manipulate conventional linguistic structures to achieve communicative goals. Humor, in this context, acts as an arena for linguistic experimentation, demonstrating not only the expressive potential of phraseology but also its adaptability to new cultural realities and communicative formats. By distorting or recontextualizing familiar expressions, humorous discourse prompts audiences to reconsider entrenched cognitive schemas and encourages a more reflective perception of language.

Cultural factors were found to play an essential role in the humorous functioning of phraseological units. The success of joke-based idiomatic reinterpretations significantly depends on shared background knowledge, cultural stereotypes, and collective experiences. This indicates that idiom-based humor fulfills important socio-cultural functions: reinforcing national identity, fostering group solidarity, and reflecting social criticism. Consequently, phraseologisms serve not only as linguistic objects but also as carriers of cultural memory and markers of ethnolinguistic identity.

The results of the research contribute valuable insights to humor studies, phraseology, pragmalinguistics, and cultural linguistics. They also open new perspectives for further investigation, including quantitative corpus analysis of idioms in digital humor, cross-cultural

comparisons, and the study of contemporary semantic shifts driven by internet communication. Future researchers may also explore the pedagogical and cognitive implications of humor-based idiomatic usage, particularly in language teaching contexts.

In summary, phraseological units in humorous discourse function as a powerful communicative tool, enriching language through creativity, cultural relevance, and pragmatic expressiveness. Their semantic transformation within jokes not only enhances their aesthetic role but also underscores the intricate relationship between language, thought, and culture. Thus, idioms continue to remain a vital component of humor, embodying both linguistic artistry and cultural identity in modern communication.

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