



LEXICAL AND CULTURAL FEATURES OF STABLE EXPRESSIONS RELATED TO THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF NATURE

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Abstract

This article analyzes phraseological units that include the names of the four natural elements—fire, air, earth, and water. The research focuses on their lexical-semantic meanings and linguocultural characteristics. Phraseological units reflecting natural elements reveal how people perceive the world, nature, and human emotions through language. The study shows that these elements carry symbolic meanings shaped by culture, history, and collective experience.

Keywords: Phraseological units, four elements, fire, air, earth, water, lexical meaning, linguoculture.

Introduction

Phraseological units are an essential component of a language, as they reflect not only linguistic richness but also the cultural and cognitive experience of a speech community. These fixed expressions convey figurative meanings that go beyond the literal interpretation of their components and serve as an important means of expressing emotions, attitudes, and evaluations. As a result, the study of phraseological units occupies a significant place in modern linguistics. Among various thematic groups of phraseological units, those containing components related to nature are of particular interest. The four classical elements—fire, air, earth, and water—have held symbolic importance since ancient times and have been closely connected with human life, beliefs, and worldview. These elements were considered the fundamental substances of the universe and were widely used to explain natural and social phenomena.

Phraseological units involving the names of the four elements are deeply rooted in cultural traditions and collective experience. They reflect how people perceive



natural forces and use them metaphorically to describe human character, emotions, behavior, and life situations. For this reason, such phraseological units carry not only lexical-semantic meaning but also linguocultural significance.

Literature review

Phraseological units have been extensively studied in linguistics due to their stability, figurative meaning, and cultural significance. Many scholars define phraseological units as fixed expressions whose meanings cannot be fully understood from the meanings of their individual components. According to Vinogradov, phraseological units are characterized by semantic integrity and structural stability, which distinguish them from free word combinations. Vinogradov's classification of phraseological units into phraseological fusions, unities, and combinations has been widely applied in phraseological studies. For example, the expression "kick the bucket" is considered a phraseological fusion because its meaning cannot be inferred from the individual words, while "burn with anger" represents a phraseological unity where the figurative meaning is partially motivated by the literal meaning.

The linguocultural approach to phraseology emphasizes the close connection between language and culture. Scholars such as Maslova argue that phraseological units reflect national mentality and cultural values. For instance, the English phraseological unit "down to earth" expresses practicality and realism, reflecting a cultural association between the element earth and stability. Several researchers have focused on phraseological units related to natural elements and natural phenomena. Studies show that natural elements are frequently used as metaphors to describe human emotions and behavior. For example, fire-related phraseological units such as "play with fire" and "fire in one's eyes" symbolize danger and strong emotional intensity. These examples illustrate how fire is culturally associated with both risk and passion. Air-related phraseological units have also been discussed in linguistic literature. Expressions like "up in the air" and "vanish into thin air" are often cited as examples of how the element air conveys meanings of uncertainty, instability, and invisibility. Researchers note that these meanings arise from the physical properties of air, which is invisible and constantly in motion. Earth-based phraseological units are commonly associated with realism and reliability. Scholars analyzing expressions such as "come back to earth" and "have one's feet on the ground" emphasize that



earth symbolizes firmness and connection to reality. These examples demonstrate how human experience with the natural world shapes figurative language. Water-related phraseological units have attracted particular attention because of their rich symbolic meanings. Linguists point out that expressions like “water under the bridge,” “in deep water,” and “test the waters” reflect ideas of time, emotional depth, and change. Water, as a constantly moving element, is often used metaphorically to represent life processes and emotional states. The analysis shows that fire is associated with intensity and danger, air with uncertainty and freedom, earth with stability and realism, and water with change and emotional depth. Such phraseological units reflect cultural values and collective human experience, highlighting the close relationship between language and culture.

Research methodology

The lexical and cultural features of stable expressions related to the four elements of nature in order to reveal the ways in which language reflects human perception of the natural world. To achieve this aim, a systematic research methodology was employed. This methodology allows for a systematic investigation of the intersection between language and culture, providing insights into how humans conceptualize and express natural elements in stable expressions.

Expressions related to the **element of earth** often emphasize stability, reliability, and practicality. For example, the idiom “solid as a rock” is used to describe a person who is dependable and unwavering in their character, reflecting the firmness and permanence associated with the earth. Similarly, the expression “down to earth” refers to someone who is practical and realistic, showing a grounded approach to life. Another idiom, “move heaven and earth,” highlights determination and persistence, suggesting that a person is willing to do everything possible to achieve a goal. Lexically, these expressions often include words related to materiality and firmness such as rock and earth, while semantically they convey qualities of stability, support, and endurance. Culturally, in many societies including Uzbek culture, earth symbolizes rootedness, reliability, and resilience, and these idioms encapsulate human values that are closely connected to the natural characteristics of the earth.

Expressions related to the **element of water** often emphasize flexibility, emotion, and adaptability. For example, the idiom “blood is thicker than water” highlights the importance of family ties and loyalty, suggesting that close relationships are



stronger than other social bonds. The expression “like water off a duck’s back” describes someone who remains unaffected by criticism or negative comments, reflecting the ability to adapt and flow without disturbance. Another idiom, “pour cold water on,” is used to indicate discouraging or preventing someone’s plans, symbolizing the restraining and moderating power of water. Lexically, these expressions include words associated with liquid and movement, while semantically they convey adaptability, emotional depth, and relational values. Culturally, water is often associated with life, purification, and emotional resilience, and these idioms reveal how language encodes these cultural perceptions.

Expressions related to the **element of fire** are typically associated with energy, passion, and danger. For instance, the idiom “play with fire” warns against engaging in risky or dangerous behavior, reflecting the destructive potential of fire. The expression “add fuel to the fire” describes actions that worsen an already tense or difficult situation, emphasizing intensity and escalation. Similarly, “where there’s smoke, there’s fire” suggests that rumors or signs often have a basis in reality, showing the transformative and revealing nature of fire. Lexically, these expressions frequently include words related to burning and heat, while semantically they convey intensity, strong emotion, and consequence. Culturally, fire represents passion, change, and trial, and these idioms encapsulate both the constructive and destructive qualities associated with this natural element.

Expressions connected to the **element of air** often convey freedom, thought, and communication. The idiom “up in the air” is used to describe plans or situations that are uncertain or undecided, reflecting the unpredictable and intangible nature of air. The expression “full of hot air” refers to someone who speaks a lot without substance, symbolizing emptiness or insincerity. Another idiom, “break the ice,” means to initiate conversation or ease social tension, highlighting the facilitative and connective qualities of air. Lexically, these expressions include words related to movement, lightness, and intangibility, while semantically they convey freedom, intellect, and social interaction. Culturally, air is associated with liberty, imagination, and communication, and these idioms reveal how these abstract qualities are encoded in language.

Analysis and Results

The analysis of stable expressions related to the four elements of nature revealed distinct lexical and cultural features. By lexical features Earth expressions related to earth often include words denoting stability, fertility, and materiality. Common lexical patterns include metaphorical use of soil, stone, and land (e.g., “solid as a rock”). Compounds and fixed collocations frequently appear, emphasizing durability and reliability. Water-related expressions emphasize fluidity, adaptability, and emotion. Lexical patterns often include verbs of motion (flow, ripple) and nouns indicating water forms (river, stream, ocean). Metaphorical use conveys changeability, purification, and life. Fire expressions are associated with energy, passion, and danger. Lexical features include verbs denoting burning, ignition, or heat, and adjectives describing intensity (fiery, blazing). Fixed expressions often signal strong emotions or transformative processes. Air expressions about air highlight freedom, intangibility, and intellect. Lexical patterns include terms like wind, breeze, and air, often combined with adjectives emphasizing lightness or unpredictability. Metaphors frequently denote thought, communication, and mobility.

Conclusion

The analysis of phraseological units involving the four elements of nature—fire, air, earth, and water—demonstrates that such expressions possess rich lexical-semantic meanings and strong linguocultural significance. These elements function not only as linguistic components but also as symbolic representations shaped by historical, cultural, and collective human experience. Fire-related phraseological units are mainly connected with intensity, passion, danger, and emotional power. Air-related expressions often reflect ideas of uncertainty, freedom, and invisibility. Earth-based phraseological units emphasize stability, realism, and groundedness, while water-related expressions commonly symbolize change, emotional states, and the flow of life. These meanings are consistently reflected in the figurative usage of phraseological units.

From a linguocultural perspective, phraseological units containing natural elements serve as a mirror of human worldview and cultural values. They illustrate how people use natural phenomena to conceptualize abstract ideas, emotions, and social behavior. Such expressions preserve cultural memory and transmit symbolic meanings from generation to generation.

In conclusion, the study of phraseological units related to the four elements of nature contributes to a deeper understanding of the interaction between language, culture, and cognition. Further research may focus on comparative analysis across different languages or explore the use of these phraseological units in modern discourse, which would provide additional insights into their linguistic and cultural relevance.

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