

SYNONYMY AS A LINGUISTIC PHENOMENON IN THE PHRASEOLOGICAL  
UNITS OF THE ENGLISH AND UZBEK LANGUAGES

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**Abstract:** This research focuses on the linguistic phenomenon of phraseological synonymy in Uzbek and English languages. The study analyzes the semantic and stylistic features of synonymous phraseological units, the factors behind their formation, and their frequency and usage in speech. It also distinguishes between synonymy and variation in phraseology and presents comparative examples from both languages. The findings highlight the role of phraseological synonyms in enriching speech and deepening the understanding of subtle semantic and stylistic meanings.

**Keywords:** phraseology, synonymy, phraseological units, variation, semantics, stylistics, Uzbek language, English language

The phenomenon of synonymy is also characteristic of phraseology: for instance, *kayfi buzuq* — *ta'bi tirriq* (“in a bad mood”), *toqati toq bo'lmoq* — *sabr kosasi to'lmoq* (“to lose patience”), *yaxshi ko'rmoq* — *ko'ngil bermoq* (“to love”).

For example:

U bir qarashda yonoq suyaklari chiqqan, kampiridahan yuzi tortishib, lablarining qimtinib turishidan Jonizoq otaning ta'bi tirriq ekanini payqadi. (S. An.)

Yodgorbek, kayfingiz buzuqroq ko'rinadimi? (N. S.)

Tojiboy o'z qiliqlari bilan uning sabr kosasini to'ldirdi. (P. T.)

Qabulxonada kutib o'tiraverib toqati toq bo'lgan arzgo'ylar rais oldiga kirishga intiladilar. (N.S.)

As lexical units, phraseological expressions can also form synonymic relations with individual words, for instance:

*tomdan tarasha tushganday* — “unexpectedly,”

*og'zi qulog'ida* — “very happy,”

*joni chiqmoq* — “to get angry,”

*ta'bi xira* — “upset,”

*quling o'rgilsin* — “wonderful.”

Synonymy is one of the semantic microsystems within linguistic units, and there are quite a number of such relations among idioms. For two idioms to be called synonyms, they must convey the same general meaning; without this, synonymy cannot be discussed. However, complete sameness of meaning should not be confused with identical meaning. Each synonym, apart from the shared semantic core that unites the group, possesses its own subtle shade of meaning.

Synonyms usually differ in one or several aspects, one of which may be a nuance in meaning. For example, *yer bilan yakson bo'lmoq* / *yer bilan yakson qilmoq* (“to destroy completely”) and *kulini ko'kka sovurmoq* / *kuli ko'kka sovurildi* (“to reduce to ashes”) are synonymous expressions that convey the same idea of total destruction. However, the latter carries a slightly stronger semantic intensity.

When defining phraseological synonyms, the imagery underlying each expression should also be considered. For instance, the synonymous expressions *bir og'iz* (“a mouthful”), *bir shingil* (“a bunch”), and *bir chimdim* (“a pinch”) are based on different images: the organ of speech, a cluster of grapes, and a small grasped amount, respectively.

It is also important to distinguish between synonymic idioms and variants of the same idiom. To do this, one should pay close attention to their word components. If idioms do not share identical lexical components, there is no doubt that they are separate synonyms. For example, the expressions *ipidan ignasigacha*, *miridan sirigacha*, *qilidan quyrug'igacha* — all meaning “in every detail” or “down to the smallest part” — are synonymous idioms that contain no identical word components.

A synonymous idiom may contain one component expressed by the same word, but in that case, the other components expressed by different words must *not* themselves be synonymous. Otherwise, they are considered *variants* of the same idiom rather than independent synonyms.

For example, *jon(i)ni hovuchlab* (“clutching one’s life”) and *yurag(i)ni hovuchlab* (“clutching one’s heart”) are synonymous idioms. One lexical component (*hovuchlab* – “clutching”) is the same, while the other components (*jon* – “life” and *yurak* – “heart”) are different and not synonymous. Hence, they are considered separate idioms with similar meanings.

However, *ko'ngil(i)ga tugmoq* (“to keep in one’s heart”) and *yurag(i)ga tugmoq* (“to keep in one’s heart”) are *variants* of the same idiom, because one lexical component (*tugmoq* – “to tie, to keep”) is identical, and the other components (*ko'ngil* and *yurak*) are synonymous.

Synonymy is a phenomenon determined by meaning. Full synonymy is observed between *monosemantic* (single-meaning) phraseological units. If a *polysemantic* (multi-meaning) idiom is involved, synonymy should be determined based on its *specific phraseological meaning*, not the idiom as a whole. Each distinct meaning of a polysemantic idiom may or may not have a synonym.

For instance, the monosemantic idiom *tan olmoq* (“to admit”) is synonymous with the first meaning of the polysemantic idiom *bo'yn(i)ga olmoq* (“to confess, to take responsibility”). The second meaning of *bo'yniga olmoq* has no synonym, whereas its third meaning is synonymous with the first meaning of *zimma(si)ga olmoq* (“to take upon oneself”). The latter idiom also has three meanings, but the other two lack synonyms.

The number of idioms included in one synonymic group (*synonymic nest*) also varies: many groups contain two synonyms, some have three, and a few include four idioms.

For example:

- The group containing *ta'zir(i)ni yemoq* (“to be punished”) includes two synonyms.
- The group with *bir yostiqa bosh qo'yimoq* (“to get married”) includes three synonyms.
- The group with *es(i)ga tushmoq* (“to remember”) includes four synonyms.

The idioms within a synonymic group also differ in how frequently they appear in actual speech. For instance, in the four-member synonymic group mentioned above, their occurrence ratio is approximately **50 : 7 : 3 : 1**, based on factual linguistic data (250, 35, 15, and 5 recorded

instances, respectively). These statistics are drawn from Shavkat Rahmatullayev's research, highlighting how extensive and nuanced synonymy is in the Uzbek language.

Below are examples of several synonymic series of phraseological units in Uzbek. The material is based on Shavkat Rahmatullayev's *Explanatory Phraseological Dictionary of the Uzbek Language*. Only synonymic groups (*nefts*) have been included in this selection. Within each group, idioms are arranged according to their frequency of use in speech. The index is organized alphabetically according to the first idiom in each synonymic group.

Subsequent idioms are listed in the same order and linked to the first idiom in the group. For polysemantic idioms, Arabic numerals indicate which specific meaning participates in the synonymic relation. After each idiom, its grammatical context (and sometimes lexical context) is provided. Following the enumeration of idioms in each group, the underlying meaning is explained, as well as the distinctive features of the synonyms and their usage characteristics in speech. The frequency of occurrence (usage rate) of each idiom is shown numerically.

**bir pullik : sariq chaqalik**  
– “worthless,” “of no value”

**bir chimdim : bir og'iz : bir shingil**  
– “a small amount,” “a little bit”

**boy bermoq : qo'ldan bermoq**  
– “to lose,” “to let slip (out of one's hands)”

**bosh(i)ga yetmoq : bosh(i)ni yemoq**  
– “to destroy,” “to kill”; the first expression carries a stronger meaning; both are common in general speech. Frequency of usage: **32—20**

**bosh(i)ga ko'tarmoq [kim o'zining nimani] : shovqin solmoq [kim]**  
– “to make a loud noise,” “to cause a commotion”; the first idiom expresses stronger intensity; the first belongs to colloquial speech, the second to general language. Frequency of usage: **41—2**

**bosh(i)dan kechmoq (2) : ko'ngl(i)dan o'tmoq**  
– “to experience,” “to go through”

**bosh(i) ko'kka yetdi kimning — bosh(i)ni ko'kka yetkazmoq nima yoki kim kimning og'z(i) qulog'(i)ga yetdi kimning — og'z(i)ning tanobi qochdi kimning — teri(si)ga sig'may ketmoq kim [o'zining] — qo'y(i) mingga yetdi kimning**  
– “to be extremely happy,” “to be overjoyed”; literally “his head reached the sky,” “his mouth reached his ears,” “he couldn't contain himself from joy.” The first idiom expresses stronger emotion; the third is more poetic, while the others belong to general speech. Frequency of usage: **44—19—9—8—1**

**bosh(i)ni bukmoq : yuz(i) yerga qaradi**  
– “to bow one's head,” “to be ashamed”

**bosh(i)ni xam qilmoq : yuz(i) yerga qaradi**  
– “to lower one's head in shame,” “to humble oneself”

**bosh(i) osmonda : og‘z(i) qulog‘ida**

– “extremely happy,” “smiling from ear to ear”

**bosh(i) shishdi : bosh(i) qotdi (2)**

– “to get dizzy,” “to be confused from thinking too much”

**bosh(i) qotdi (1) kimning**

– “to think deeply but reach no clear idea”; both idioms are used in general speech; the first expresses a stronger sense. Frequency: 10—6

**bosh(i) qotdi (2) kimning — bosh(i)ni qotirmoq kim kimning — miya(si) g‘ovlab ketdi kimning — miya(si)ni g‘ovlatib yubormoq kim kimning**

– “to get confused,” “to be overwhelmed with thoughts”; the second expression is more intensive and more colloquial. Frequency: 55—12—1

**bosh suqmoq (2) kim qayerga — burn(i)ni suqmoq (1) kim [o‘zining] qayerga**

– “to enter,” “to poke one’s nose into (something)”; the second meaning is more abstract; both belong to general speech. Frequency: 14—2

**bosh suqmoq (3) : bosh qo‘shmoq (1) — burn(i)ni suqmoq (2)**

– “to interfere,” “to get involved”; the latter two are more abstract and carry a negative connotation. All three are general in usage. Frequency: 9—7—4

**bosh egmoq (1) : bo‘yin egmoq (1)**

– “to bow one’s head,” “to submit (physically or metaphorically)”

**bo‘yin egmoq (2) : bosh egmoq (2)**

– “to obey,” “to submit”; the first expression carries stronger meaning; both are typical of general speech. Frequency: 17—15

**bo‘yn(i)ni ham qilmoq kim [o‘zining] kimga**

– “to act obediently,” “to show submission”; the first is stronger in meaning; the third is archaic, used in artistic language; the others belong to general speech. Frequency: 8—5—2

**burn(i)ni ko‘tarilmoq kim [o‘zining] — burn(i) ko‘tarildi kimning — dimog‘(i) shishdi kimning [nimadan]**– “to act arrogantly,” “to become conceited”; the first focuses on *showing off*, the second on *pride*; both belong to general speech. Frequency: 8—3

Phraseological synonyms are not particularly diverse in terms of their stylistic use — they mainly belong to colloquial speech, and only partially appear in other forms of speech. For example, the idioms *ko‘z(i)ni yum-* (“to close one’s eyes”) and *dun/yodan o‘t-* (“to pass away”) belong to literary or elevated speech, while their synonym *jon ber-* (“to die”) is typical of colloquial speech.

It is important to distinguish between synonymous phraseological units and variants (allophrasemes) of the same phraseological unit. For instance, *oxori to‘kilmagan* and *qirovi to‘kilmagan* both mean “new, untouched,” and are therefore synonymous because they are based on different images — the first comes from weaving, the second from knife-making — and are formed from different lexical items. However, *bosh(i)da yong‘oq chaq-*, *bosh(i)da*

*danak chaq-*, and *bosh(i)da tosh chaq-* are variants (allophrasemes) of a single idiom, as the substitution of one lexical component for another gradually strengthens the meaning (*yong'oq* → *danak* → *tosh*).

Synonymy can also occur between a phraseological unit (phraseosememe) and a single lexical item (lexosememe). This phenomenon is called *phraseological-lexical synonymy*. For example, the idiom *yulduzni benarvon uradi* (“to be very skillful”) is synonymous with the adjective *abjir* (“nimble”), and *dunyoni suv bossa, to'pig'(i)ga chiqmaydi* (“utterly carefree”) corresponds to *beg'am* (“carefree”). However, a phraseological unit differs sharply from its lexical synonym in terms of connotation and emotional coloring — expressing an idea with a phraseological unit is more vivid and impactful than with a single word.

Phraseological synonyms are usually native to the language itself — for instance, *bir yostiqla bosh qo'y-* (“to live together as a married couple”) and *turmush qur-* (“to get married”), or *bir og'iz* and *bir shingil* (“a little”). Borrowing phraseological units from other languages is quite rare, and consequently, synonymy created through such borrowings is almost non-existent.<sup>1</sup>

Studying the role of synonymy in the development of phraseological units and analyzing different types of synonymic FBs (stylistic, ideographic, and stylistic-ideographic) helps to simplify the process of defining them in lexicographic entries. The rapid development of English phraseology has also accelerated the growth of synonymic relations among FBs. Derived phraseological units often form synonymic links with widespread idioms. For example: *like a (dying) duck in a thunderstorm* // *like a half-stunned (or stunned) duck* (“looking miserable, dejected”). However, stylistic features often differ between synonymic FBs. For instance, *get a kick (out of something)* [colloquial] and *get a bang (out of something)* [slang] both mean “to enjoy something,” but differ stylistically.

As a result, various kinds of phraseological synonyms — stylistic, ideographic, and stylistic-ideographic — are actively used in speech. To understand and evaluate each phraseological synonym properly, it must be compared with other members of its synonymic group. This comparison reveals both their similarities and distinctive features. The fewer the differences between them, the greater the likelihood that one can substitute the other in speech.

For example:

- *to come to bat* (sl.) — “to face a difficult issue, to undergo a tough test”;
- *to come out (of) the little end (or the horn)* — “to fail, to end up in an awkward or shameful situation”;
- *to spell baker* — “to face difficulties, to take on a hard task”;
- *to get oneself into a spot* (sl.) — “to get into trouble, to find oneself in a difficult situation”;
- *to run against a stump* — “to face obstacles”;
- *to go up a tree* — “to be in a very difficult situation”;

<sup>1</sup> Rahmatullayev Sh. *The Modern Uzbek Literary Language*. – Tashkent: Universitet Publishing House, 2006.

- *to get that way* — “to get into an unpleasant situation.”

Studying the relationship between *variation* and *synonymy* in phraseological units is a key factor in resolving the difficulties that arise when distinguishing between these two phenomena. Differentiating variation and synonymy is often complicated by various stylistic factors such as imagery, expressiveness, and others. Linguists who regard these factors as essential properties of phraseological units tend to see them as being incompatible with the notion of similarity. These scholars treat identical or nearly identical units as *variants*, considering the *shared imagery* among variants as their defining feature, while *stylistic markers* are used to distinguish synonyms.<sup>2</sup>

Another group of researchers interprets *variation* more broadly. According to them, variants are units that may differ to some degree in stylistic features but still display a certain degree of similarity. Minor changes do not disrupt the essential similarity between variants. From this perspective, stylistic aspects can serve both to distinguish variants from one another and to separate them from synonyms. Consequently, the classification of variants becomes much broader.

To fully understand *variation* and *synonymy*, we must adhere to the *principle of invariance*, because it not only reveals the essence of these phenomena but also helps to identify the distinctive features that differentiate variants from synonyms. Phraseological units that are actively used in a language usually have variants.

For example:

- *full as a good (boot, bull, egg)* — “drunk as a cobbler”;
- *bald as a bandicoot (billiard ball)* — “completely bald”;
- *rough as bags (goats’ knees)* — “rough, rude”;
- *silly as a cut snake (wheel, two bob watch)* — “foolish, ridiculous.”

It is well known that synonyms are words belonging to the same language, typically within the same part of speech, that have the same or nearly the same meaning and can, in some contexts, substitute for one another without changing the denotational meaning. However, they may differ in morphological composition, phonemic form, shades of meaning, collocability, emotional coloring, stylistic level, valency, or idiomatic usage.

*Absolute phraseological synonyms* are extremely rare in any language. Examples include:

- *be in the secret* — *be in the secret*;
- *keep under lock and key* — *keep under watch and ward*;
- *take advantage of something* — *seize advantage of something*;
- *tell a lie* — *lie in one’s throat* — *spin a lie* — *lie one’s head off* — *tell a story* — *lie out of the whole cloth* — *spin a yarn* — *tell an untruth*.

<sup>2</sup> Amosova N.N. *Foundations of English Phraseology*. – Leningrad: Leningrad State University, 1963. – 208 pages.

Over time, absolute synonyms tend to develop differences in shades of meaning or usage. If two words are identical in meaning and use, it is natural that one will eventually change its meaning or fall out of use. Phraseological synonyms, therefore, usually differ slightly in meaning. Such synonyms are quite numerous in English, and within them, we can easily identify both shared and distinctive semantic elements. Thus, all synonyms serve to express a single concept from various angles and with different degrees of completeness.

However, not all phraseological synonyms are identical. Even closely related ones can be distinguished semantically:<sup>3</sup>

- *for ever* — *for good (and all)* — *for keeps*;
- *go to bed* — *go to roost* — *hit the hay* — *hit the sack*.

Among verbs, we can find phraseological synonyms that express a similar action but with slightly different nuances:

- *give somebody a surprise* (dominant synonym: “to surprise someone”),
- *make somebody open his eyes* (“to greatly surprise someone”),
- *make somebody sit up* (“to astonish or impress someone”),
- *take somebody’s breath away* (“to amaze someone”).

Examples of these idioms in context include:

*I just wanted to give her a surprise; how was I to know you'd already bought tickets?*<sup>4</sup>

*It is logically impossible for the teacher to give a surprise quiz.*<sup>5</sup>

**A:** “Isn’t it splendid? I have not only come out top of the list but I’ve got the largest scholarship as well.”

**B:** “Magnificent! That’ll make your family open their eyes, won’t it! They always used to regard you as the dunce!” (*Jones L.*)

**A:** “Have you got a lawyer?”

**B:** “Not yet.”

**A:** “I’ll send you mine. He’ll make them sit up!” (*Galsworthy J.*)<sup>6</sup>

*The unexpected news of this fresh piece of munificence has taken our breath away.* (*Ogilvie V.*)

In addition, synonyms may differ in the degree of quality, the intensity of the actions performed, or the level of emotions expressed:

<sup>3</sup> Kunin A.V. *English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary*. – Moscow: Russkiy Yazyk, 1984. – 944 pages.

<sup>4</sup> *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> “Game Theory Tuesdays: I Want to Surprise You.” *Mind Your Decisions*, 2008. Retrieved from <https://mindyourdecisions.com/blog/2008/01/22/game-theory-tuesdays-i-want-to-surprise-you/>

<sup>6</sup> Galsworthy, J. (2018). *A Modern Comedy II*. Moscow: T8RUGRAM / Original. — 372 p.

rain cats and dogs (old-fashioned)  
rain in buckets  
rain in torrents  
rain like hell (informal)  
rain pitchforks (mainly American English)

Synonyms can also differ in the volume or scope of the concept they express:

keep silence  
hold one's gab  
hold one's jaw  
hold (shut up) one's noise  
hold one's peace  
hold one's tongue  
hold one's whistle  
keep one's breath  
keep one's face/head shut  
keep one's mouth  
keep one's tongue between one's teeth  
keep one's yap shut / shut one's yap<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion, phraseological synonymy represents a complex and distinctive layer within the lexical-syntactic systems of different languages, holding an important place in linguistics. Throughout the research, the formation factors, semantic structures, stylistic diversity, and functional features of synonymy in Uzbek and English phraseological units were thoroughly analyzed.

The findings revealed that phraseological synonyms in both languages, while conveying a shared lexical meaning, also demonstrate varying degrees of emotional-expressive and stylistic coloring, which significantly distinguishes them from ordinary lexical synonyms.

The study also showed that although phraseological synonyms are formed based on semantic equivalence, they differ in connotative meaning, degree of imagery, fields of usage, frequency, and expressive tone. In particular, the issue of distinguishing between variants and synonyms remains a relevant scientific problem in phraseology. During the research, the interrelation and differentiation principles of these two phenomena were consistently demonstrated. The results showed that while synonymy arises on the basis of a common semantic core, variation is associated with the modification of structural elements, leading to the intensification or refinement of meaning.

Overall, the conducted analyses demonstrated that phraseological synonymy not only broadens the internal semantic potential of a language but also plays an invaluable role in ensuring the expressiveness, stylistic richness, and logical precision of speech.

The results of this research contribute to enriching theoretical perspectives in phraseology, hold practical value for the compilation of reference materials and dictionaries, and serve as a

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<sup>7</sup> Tulanbayeva, Sh. Sh. (2017). *Some Reflections on the Phraseological Synonyms in English*. No. 2 (6), pp. 81–83.  
Retrieved from <https://moluch.ru/th/6/archive/59/2535/>

significant resource for language learners and translators. In the future, the further study of phraseological synonymy from pragmatic, psycholinguistic, and cognitive-linguistic perspectives will naturally enhance the scientific potential of this field.

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