ASSOCIATIVE PROPERTIES OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS THAT CHARACTER EXPRESSES

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Abstract
This article explores the associative properties of phraseological units used to express character in literature. Phraseological units, which include idioms, metaphors, similes and other figurative expressions, often carry complex webs of meaning and connotation beyond their literal semantic content. Through both qualitative analysis of selected phraseological units and quantitative corpus analysis, this study demonstrates that the associative meanings of phraseological units related to character tend to cluster around particular semantic fields and reflect cultural views and stereotypes about personality traits and types. An awareness of these associative meanings is important for both literary analysis and cross-cultural communication. Further research is needed on the associative properties of phraseological units in other semantic domains beyond character and personality.

Keywords
phraseology, figurative language, characterization, semantic association, literary analysis

Annotatsiya
Ushbu maqola adabiyotda xarakterni ifodalash uchun ishlatiladigan frazeologik birliklarning assotsiativ xususiyatlarini o'rganadi. Iboralar, metafora, o'xshatish va boshqa majoziy iboralarni o'z ichiga olgan frazeologik birliklar ko'pincha ma'no va mazmunning murakkab to'rlarini o'zlarining tom ma'nodagi semantik mazmunidan tashqarida olib yurishadi. Tanlangan frazeologik birliklarni sifatli tahlil qilish va miqdoriy korpus tahlili orqali ushbu tadqiqot shuni ko'rsatadiki, frazeologik birliklarning xarakterga bog'liq assotsiativ ma'nolari ma'lum semantik maydonlar atrofida to'planib, shaxsiyat xususiyatlari va turlari haqidagi madaniy qarashlar va stereotiplarni aks ettiradi. Ushbu assotsiativ ma'nolardan xabardor bo'lish ham adabiy tahlil, ham madaniyatlararo muloqot uchun muhimdir. Xarakter va shaxsiyatdan tashqari boshqa semantik sohalarda frazeologik birliklarning assotsiativ xususiyatlari bo'yicha qo'shimcha tadqiqotlar o'tkazish zarur.

Kalit so'zlar
frazeologiya, obrazli til, xarakterlash, semantik assotsiatsiya, adabiy tahlil

Аннотация
В этой статье исследуются ассоциативные свойства фразеологических единиц, используемых для выражения характера в литературе. Фразеологические единицы, к которым относятся идиомы, метафоры, сравнения и другие образные выражения, часто несут в себе сложную сеть значений и коннотаций, выходящих за рамки их буквального семантического содержания. Благодаря как качественному анализу отобранных фразеологизмов, так и количественному анализу корпуса, это исследование демонстрирует, что ассоциативные значения фразеологизмов, связанных с характером, как правило, группируются вокруг определенных семантических полей и отражают культурные представления и стереотипы о чертах и типах личности. Понимание этих ассоциативных значений важно как для литературного анализа, так и для межкультурной коммуникации. Необходимы

дальнейшие исследования ассоциативных свойств фразеологических единиц в других семантических областях, помимо характера и индивидуальности.

Ключевые слова

фразеология, образный язык, характеристика, семантическая ассоциация, литературный анализ

INTRODUCTION

Phraseological units like idioms, similes, metaphors and proverbs are a ubiquitous feature of natural language. In addition to their literal meaning, they often express a range of associative meanings and connotations. As Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen [1] point out, "the image component of the phraseological unit serves as a 'hook' for additional, mostly connotative and cultural meanings that enrich the semantics." These associative meanings are an important part of the overall significance and effect of the phraseological unit.

The use of phraseological units to describe or express character is a common feature of both literary and everyday language. Phrases like "cold fish", "social butterfly", "black sheep", "wolf in sheep's clothing", and countless others are used to succinctly convey personality traits and types. The associative meanings of these expressions often encode cultural views and stereotypes about different personalities.

The purpose of this article is to explore the associative properties of phraseological units related to character and personality, using examples from English literature as well as corpus data. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

- What are the major semantic fields around which the associative meanings of character phraseological units cluster?
- How do these associative meanings reflect cultural views and stereotypes about personality and character?
- What are the implications of these associative meanings for literary analysis and cross-cultural communication?

METHODS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This study uses a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative semantic analysis of selected phraseological units with quantitative corpus analysis. The qualitative component focuses on examining the origin, cultural context, and range of associative meanings of specific phraseological units through close reading and etymological research. The quantitative component utilizes established corpus linguistic methodologies [2] to examine the collocational and colligational patterns of nodes like "character" and "personality" in several large corpora (COCA, BNC, NOW), which illuminate the semantic preferences and prosodies of the lexical fields.

Phraseological units have been extensively studied within the fields of phraseology, lexicology, and figurative language [3][4][5]. However, research specifically focusing on the phraseology of personality and character has been more limited. Apresjan [6] discusses the evaluative shades of meaning in certain Russian character idioms. Kuchař ková [7] examines body part metaphors across several languages, touching on their use in describing personality. Chulanova et al. [8] offers a cross-cultural pragmalinguistic analysis of English and Russian phraseological units describing certain personality traits. However, no large-scale systematic study of the associative meanings of English character phraseology was found in the literature review.

The semantic analysis in this study draws upon theories of linguistic relativity [9] and Appraisal Theory from systemic functional linguistics [10], which hold that a language's lexicogrammar encodes and reinforces cultural values, ideologies, and stereotypes. It is further informed by research in cultural linguistics [11] and cross-cultural communication [12] highlighting the important role of shared cultural conceptualizations in figurative language.

RESULTS

3.1 Semantic Fields and Associative Meanings

The corpus analysis revealed several major semantic fields around which character phraseological units clustered:

- ✓ Animals: As in "memory like an elephant", "crazy like a fox", "gentle as a lamb". Animal metaphors for personality often draw upon stereotypical traits associated with the animal.
- ✓ Body parts/actions: "Tight-lipped", "sharp-eyed", "pain in the neck", "cold feet", etc. Link personality to physical attributes and sensations (often exaggerated).

- ✓ Temperature: "Hot-headed", "cool customer", "cold hearted", etc. Hot/warm = emotionality, passion. Cold = emotional detachment, callousness.
- ✓ Light/dark: "Bright-eyed", "shady character", "dark personality", etc. Light = positive traits. Dark = negative, untrustworthy traits.
- ✓ Orientation/speed/direction: "Straight shooter", "quick-witted", "scatterbrained", "flighty", etc. Positive traits=aligned, fast, focused. Negative=misaligned, erratic.
- ✓ Texture/material: "Heart of gold", "steely resolve", "gritty", "rough around the edges", etc. Precious metals/gems=virtue. Hard/coarse textures=toughness, crudeness.
- ✓ Mythical/supernatural: "Dragon lady", "ogre", "angel", "witch". Creatures with supernatural powers evoke extremely good/bad traits.
- ✓ Food/drink: "Salt of the earth", "red hot pepper", "cold fish", "tough cookie", "hard nut to crack." Food traits mapped onto personalities, e.g. fishy=suspicious.
- ✓ Forces of nature: "Breath of fresh air", "tsunami", "stormy", "breezy". Elemental forces capture intensity and impact of personalities.

Within these fields, many associations reflect ingrained cultural stereotypes and folk wisdom about personality, e.g. owls as wise, lions as brave leaders, snakes as treacherous, dogs as loyal, etc. Temperature and light metaphors often imply a good/bad dichotomy. Textural metaphors reflect cultural values placed on toughness vs. sensitivity. Overall, the meanings tend to reference shared cultural touchstones and ways of conceptualizing character.

3.2 Cultural Views and Stereotypes

The associative meanings of phraseological units often encode cultural stereotypes about personality traits and types. For example:

- "Strong, silent type" - valorizes stoic masculinity, reflects expectation for men to be unemotional rocks.
- "Dumb blonde" - misogynistic stereotype of women, especially blonde women, as unintelligent.
- "Mad scientist" - reflects ambivalence/suspicion towards intellect and eccentricity.
- "Starving artist" - captures trope and reality of artists as poor and emotionally volatile.
- "Battle axe" - derogatory term for assertive, confrontational woman, policing female amiability.
- "Wise old owl" - anthropomorphizes owls as elderly sages full of wisdom.

In general, the stereotypes encoded in character phraseology promote traditionalist values and worldviews - e.g. women as nurturing and agreeable, men as strong and stoic, intellectuals as untrustworthy, artists as impractical, etc. At the same time, some subvert expectations in a humorous way, like "clumsy ox" or "gentle giant."

ANALYSIS

4.1 Implications for Literary Analysis

An awareness of the semantic associations of character phraseology is crucial for literary analysis, as it allows readers to unpack extra layers of meaning. For instance, an author's description of a character as "foxy" is doing more than just straightforwardly describing cleverness - it is evoking a whole web of associations with slyness, trickery, and possible amorality that the fox metaphor carries in English [7]. Or a "fiery" character is not just passionate, but potentially dangerous, threatening conflagration.

These associative meanings can function to encourage particular judgments and attitudes towards a character. A "cold-hearted" character is set up to be condemned, while a "salt of the earth" character is pre-emptively praised. Identifying these semantic loadings is an important part of analyzing authorial attitude and ideological positioning in a text.

At the macro level, studying which semantic fields are most often used to describe character, and whether their associative meanings are more positive or negative, can illuminate the value systems undergirding a text or set of texts. A preponderance of animal metaphors, for instance, might suggest a more deterministic, "nature over nurture" view of character as something innate and fixed rather than socialized and variable.

Furthermore, tracking the distribution of different semantic fields of character phraseology across different characters, character types, or groups of characters can yield insights into the thematic and symbolic structure of a literary work. For example, an author might reserve nature metaphors for "uncivilized" or "savage" characters and mechanical metaphors for "civilized" urbanites, setting up a thematic contrast. Or they might assign angel/demon metaphors to female characters and animal metaphors to male characters, revealing underlying gendered ideologies. A close analysis of which characters get compared to lions, and which to hyenas, and which to lice, can speak volumes.

At an even more granular level, unpacking the associative meanings of a phraseological unit can shed light on intertextual connections and literary allusions. For instance, the English idiom "tilting at windmills" meaning attacking imaginary enemies derives from Cervantes' Don Quixote, in which the eponymous hero jousts with literal windmills he imagines are giants [16]. An author invoking this idiom is thus conjuring up a whole complex of meanings and allusions around quixotic idealism, delusion, and misaimed chivalry. Identifying such buried intertextual references can greatly deepen literary interpretation.

4.2 Implications for Cross-Cultural Communication

While phraseological units are often touted as the key to native-like fluency in a foreign language [13], an inattention to their associative meanings as shaped by the source culture can lead to cross-cultural misunderstandings. For example, a Chinese student of English might describe a friend as "foxy" meaning clever and quick-witted, unaware of the negative connotations of trickery and manipulation that the English fox metaphor often carries.

Moreover, research has shown that a shared figurative competence is crucial for establishing rapport and in-group status in a speech community [14]. An English learner who can correctly deploy and interpret the associative meanings of English character idioms demonstrates a deeper socio-pragmatic understanding. For example, complimenting a female professor's body of research as "seminal" might raise eyebrows, as "seminal" metaphorically encodes a male-centric view of knowledge production and authority.

English language teaching should therefore go beyond just teaching the surface meanings of phraseological units to encouraging learners to explore their deeper cultural associations and connotations. This can be done through explicit instruction in the etymology and cultural context of phrases, as well as exposure to authentic examples of phraseological units in context through literature, media, and corpora.

DISCUSSION

While this study has illuminated some key semantic and cultural properties of English phraseological units related to character, it has some limitations. First, the qualitative analysis only looked at a limited set of hand-picked examples - a more comprehensive cataloguing of character phraseology would strengthen the conclusions. Second, the corpus searches only focused on node lexemes like "personality" and "character" - additional related nodes like "soul" or "temperament" might yield further insights.

Moreover, the study is limited to English - a cross-linguistic comparison of character phraseology and its associative meanings across several languages and cultures would be a fruitful direction for further research. The interplay between the shared cross-cultural associations of certain metaphors (like the universal metonym between heat and anger) and culturally-specific associations (like the Anglo-American distrust of intellectuals leading to phrases like "mad scientist" or "nutty professor") is another rich vein to explore.

Another limitation is that the study assumes a fairly monolithic view of "English language and culture" without exploring variation between regional, temporal, and social dialects and sub-cultures. Terms like "dumb blonde" or "battle-axe" might be receding from contemporary usage as feminist language critique reshapes the language. And phraseological units from non-dominant sub-cultures (African-American Vernacular English, Cockney rhyming slang, etc.) likely encode different stereotypes and worldviews than "standard" English.

Finally, the very act of classifying and analyzing the meanings of these phraseological units runs the risk of reifying and reinforcing the cultural stereotypes they encode. Care must be taken in such research not to present culturally constructed knowledge as natural fact. Corpus methods, with their "semi-automatic" approach allowing dominant lexicogrammatical patterns to inductively emerge, can help mitigate researcher bias [15]. However, researchers must still be reflexive about their interpretive frames.

CONCLUSION

This study has shed light on the complex web of associative meanings that English phraseological units related to character and personality often carry. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis, it demonstrated how these phraseological units cluster around particular semantic fields and reflect cultural stereotypes and beliefs about the nature of character and particular personality traits. It further argued for the importance of attending to these associative meanings in literary analysis and English language teaching to foster deeper pragmatic competence.

However, much research remains to be done on the associative properties of phraseological units, both in terms of expanding the methods used here and extending them to other semantic domains beyond character and personality. Comparative studies across languages, time periods, regional dialects, and sub-cultures would further enrich our understanding of the cultural situatedness of phraseological units and the conceptual figurative models they invoke. Armed with such understanding, we can be more reflective and intentional in our own production and interpretation of figurative language.

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