



The stylistic functions of phraseological units in newspaper themes

Periyzat NURLIMURATOVA¹

Nukus State Pedagogical Institute named after Ajiniyaz

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ABSTRACT

Phraseological units (PUs), encompassing idioms, collocations, proverbs, and clichés, have long been recognized as integral elements of natural language use. In newspaper discourse, however, they perform distinctive stylistic functions that extend beyond ordinary conversation. The stylistic deployment of PUs in the press allows journalists to balance between objectivity and expressiveness, thereby shaping both the tone of reporting and the ideological framing of events. This article presents a corpus-based study of PUs in English-language newspapers, examining their frequency, distribution, stylistic roles, and creative adaptations. The results reveal that PUs are especially concentrated in headlines and opinion journalism, where they attract attention, convey evaluation, and simplify complex phenomena. Moreover, journalists often adapt PUs creatively by truncating, substituting, or hybridizing them in order to maintain novelty while preserving recognizability. Consequently, PUs proves to be not merely decorative but essential tools of stylistic design in modern newspapers.

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Gazetalar mavzularida frazeologik birlikmalarning uslubiy vazifalari

ANNOTATSIYA

Kalit so'zlar:

frazeologik birliklar,
iboralar,
matbuot nutqi,
uslubshunoslik,

Frazeologik birliklar (FB) – iboralar, turg'un birikmalar, maqollar va klishelarni o'z ichiga olgan holda, uzoq vaqtdan beri tabiiy til qo'llanishining ajralmas qismi sifatida e'tirof etilgan. Biroq, gazeta nutqida ular oddiy muloqotdan tashqari o'ziga xos

¹ Doctoral Student, Department of English Language and Literature, Nukus State Pedagogical Institute named after Ajiniyaz.

konseptual qoliplash,
jurnalistik til.

uslubiy vazifalarni bajaradi. Matbuotda FBlarning uslubiy jihatdan qo'llanilishi jurnalistlarga xolislik va ifodalilik o'rtasidagi muvozanatni saqlash imkonini beradi, bu esa xabar ohangini ham, voqealarning g'oyaviy talqinini ham shakllantiradi. Ushbu maqolada ingliz tilidagi gazetalardagi FBlarning korpus asosida o'rganilishi, ularning chastotasi, tarqalishi, uslubiy vazifalari va ijodiy o'zgartirishlari tahlil qilinadi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, FBlar, ayniqsa, sarlavhalar va fikr-mulohaza jurnalistikasida ko'p uchraydi, bunda ular e'tiborni jalb qiladi, baho beradi va murakkab hodisalarni soddalashtiradi. Bundan tashqari, jurnalistlar ko'pincha FBlarni qisqartirish, almashtirib qo'llash yoki ularni birlashtirib yangi shakl yaratish orqali ijodiy o'zgartiradilar, bu esa tanishlik hissini saqlab qolgan holda yangilik taassurotini uyg'otadi. Shunday qilib, FBlar zamonaviy gazetalarda shunchaki bezak emas, balki uslubiy dizaynning muhim vositasi ekanligini ko'rsatadi.

Стилистические функции фразеологических единиц в газетных заголовках

Ключевые слова:
фразеологические
единицы,
идиомы,
газетный дискурс,
стилистика,
фрейминг,
язык журналистики.

АННОТАЦИЯ

Фразеологические единицы (ФЕ), включающие в себя идиомы, устойчивые словосочетания, пословицы и клише, давно признаны неотъемлемыми элементами естественного языкового употребления. Однако в газетном дискурсе они выполняют особые стилистические функции, выходящие за рамки обычной беседы. Стилистическое использование ФЕ в прессе позволяет журналистам балансировать между объективностью и выразительностью, тем самым формируя как тон репортажа, так и идеологическую интерпретацию событий. В данной статье представлено корпусное исследование ФЕ в англоязычных газетах, изучающее их частоту, распределение, стилистические роли и творческие адаптации. Результаты показывают, что ФЕ особенно часто встречаются в заголовках и публицистике, где они привлекают внимание, передают оценку и упрощают сложные явления. Более того, журналисты часто творчески адаптируют ФЕ, сокращая, заменяя или комбинируя их, чтобы сохранить новизну при сохранении узнаваемости. Следовательно, ФЕ оказываются не просто декоративными, но и необходимыми инструментами стилистического оформления в современных газетах.

INTRODUCTION

Language in the mass media occupies a special place in the life of modern societies. Newspapers, despite the growing dominance of digital platforms, remain a powerful medium for shaping public discourse, setting agendas, and constructing ideological frames.

Unlike purely informational texts, newspapers are hybrid communicative entities: they simultaneously transmit facts, interpret events, and attempt to persuade audiences. Therefore, their language is often marked by stylistic features that balance factual reporting with rhetorical appeal.

One of the most salient stylistic resources in newspapers is phraseology. Phraseological units (PUs), which include idioms, proverbs, clichés, and fixed collocations, represent conventionalized linguistic forms with meanings that are often metaphorical, non-literal, or culturally anchored. Their stability, cultural resonance, and figurative nature make them particularly effective tools for journalistic discourse. For example, when a headline declares that a government is “*walking a tightrope*”, it does not describe a literal circus act but rather conveys the precarious political situation in a vivid and memorable way.

The stylistic relevance of PUs in newspapers is threefold. Firstly, they enhance expressiveness, giving journalistic texts vividness and emotional appeal. Secondly, they contribute to evaluation, allowing writers to implicitly judge political decisions, economic conditions, or social phenomena. Thirdly, they serve as framing devices, simplifying complex issues through metaphorical templates that readers can easily process. Importantly, the very recognizability of PUs means that they can condense large amounts of cultural and cognitive meaning into short expressions, which is particularly valuable in space-constrained contexts like headlines.

Nevertheless, despite their frequent presence in newspapers, phraseological units have often been treated as stylistic embellishments rather than as systematic tools of discourse. Scholarly attention has tended to focus more on metaphors, rhetorical figures, or lexical choice in journalistic texts, while the role of PUs has received relatively less comprehensive treatment. Moreover, although some studies have noted their presence in specific genres such as sports journalism or political commentary, fewer have attempted a cross-genre, systematic analysis of their stylistic functions.

METHODOLOGY

In order to explore the stylistic functions of phraseological units in newspaper discourse, the study employed a qualitative content analysis combined with elements of quantitative frequency analysis. This mixed approach was selected because it allows not only for the identification of phraseological units but also for the systematic assessment of their stylistic distribution across themes. Consequently, the research design integrates both interpretive and statistical dimensions.

Before engaging in empirical work, it is essential to highlight the theoretical perspectives that informed this study. Phraseological research has long emphasized the expressive and cultural significance of fixed expressions. For instance, Kunin argued that phraseological units enrich texts through metaphorical transfer, thereby elevating stylistic vividness [4]. Similarly, Chitra stressed that idioms are not merely decorative, but function as integral devices for conveying pragmatic and stylistic meaning [2].

Moreover, Moon provided a comprehensive analysis of idioms in discourse, demonstrating how they construct ideology and establish intertextual links with readers' cultural knowledge [6]. Mieder focused on proverbs in mass communication, concluding that such units play a persuasive role by appealing to collective wisdom [5]. Finally, Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen highlighted the semiotic and cultural layers of phraseological units, noting that their frequent use in media texts strengthens reader engagement through familiarity and shared cultural memory [1].

These studies provide a theoretical foundation, suggesting that phraseological units serve not only stylistic but also cognitive and ideological functions in media texts. Therefore, the current research builds on this framework while offering an empirical investigation of contemporary English-language newspaper discourse.

For the purposes of this study, a corpus of 50 newspaper articles was compiled from widely recognized English-language outlets: *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post*. The selection aimed to represent diverse themes – politics, economics, culture, and social issues – thereby ensuring a comprehensive overview of stylistic tendencies. Furthermore, the articles were collected from 2020 to 2023, allowing the analysis to reflect modern linguistic usage.

Phraseological units were identified using a manual close-reading strategy supported by reference to the *Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms* and other phraseological dictionaries. Each identified unit was then categorized according to three criteria:

1. Type of phraseological unit (idioms, proverbs, set collocations).
2. Thematic context (politics, economics, culture, social issues).
3. Stylistic function (expressive, persuasive, evaluative, ironic).

To enhance reliability, two researchers independently coded the data, and inter-coder agreement was measured. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, which further ensured the validity of the classification.

RESULTS

The findings reveal that phraseological units were present across all newspaper themes, although their distribution and function varied. Notably, political articles contained the largest number of idioms and proverbs, reflecting journalists' tendency to dramatize debates and highlight power struggles. Conversely, economic reports used fewer idioms but often relied on metaphorical imagery (e.g., *"tighten one's belt"*, *"economic meltdown"*), thereby making abstract financial issues more accessible to the general public.

Moreover, the study demonstrated that phraseological units performed multiple stylistic functions. Firstly, expressiveness was the dominant function, as idioms infused texts with vividness and immediacy. Secondly, persuasiveness was evident when phraseological units framed arguments in ways that resonated with shared cultural knowledge. Thirdly, evaluative functions appeared when idioms conveyed the journalist's stance, often highlighting approval or criticism. Finally, ironic usage was particularly visible in opinion pieces, where writers creatively reworked familiar expressions for humorous or critical effect.

To present the findings more clearly, the table below summarizes the distribution of phraseological units by theme and stylistic function:

Table 1.

Distribution of Phraseological Units in Newspaper Themes

Theme	Average number of PUs per article	Dominant Types of Units	Main Stylistic Functions	Example Expressions
Politics	12–15	Idioms, proverbs	Expressive, persuasive, ironic	<i>"The ball is in their court," "at the eleventh hour"</i>

Economics	6–8	Idioms, collocations	Evaluative, explanatory, expressive	<i>“Tighten the belt,” “economic meltdown”</i>
Culture	8–10	Idioms, proverbial sayings	Expressive, intertextual, humorous	<i>“Break the ice,” “old wine in new bottles”</i>
Social Issues	7–9	Idioms, set collocations	Persuasive, evaluative, ironic	<i>“Walking on thin ice,” “tip of the iceberg”</i>

Overall, the results demonstrate that phraseological units are not random stylistic devices but carefully chosen linguistic tools. They not only enhance readability and expressiveness but also subtly guide readers’ interpretations, thereby reinforcing the ideological and persuasive goals of journalism.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that phraseological units (PUs) are widely employed in newspaper discourse and serve a range of stylistic functions. Importantly, the results confirm previous scholarly insights while also providing new perspectives on the ways in which contemporary journalism strategically deploys phraseological resources.

Firstly, the dominance of expressiveness as a function aligns with Kunin’s assertion that phraseological units enrich texts by introducing figurative and emotive dimensions [4]. In fact, the frequent use of idioms such as *“at the eleventh hour”* or *“the ball is in their court”* illustrates how journalists dramatize events to create urgency. Thus, as Kunin suggested, phraseological units elevate stylistic vividness, making otherwise routine news more engaging for readers.

Secondly, the persuasive function identified in political and social issue articles reflects Moon’s claim that idioms are not merely decorative but play an ideological role [6]. By embedding culturally familiar expressions, newspapers construct a sense of shared knowledge with readers, which in turn legitimizes their arguments. For example, idioms like *“tip of the iceberg”* were frequently used to persuade readers that certain issues extend far beyond visible facts, thereby shaping their interpretation of reality.

Although previous studies, such as Chitra and Mieder emphasized the evaluative role of proverbs and idioms, this study extends their observations by demonstrating that ironic usage has become increasingly prominent in contemporary opinion journalism [2;5]. Indeed, journalists often reworked familiar expressions for humorous or critical effect, which not only entertained readers but also subtly undermined political figures or policies. This confirms Dobrovol’skij and Piirainen’s argument that phraseological units are powerful semiotic tools, since their ironic reinterpretation plays with cultural memory and shared expectations [1].

Moreover, the results highlight that the choice of phraseological units varies across themes. For instance, political journalism contained the highest concentration of idioms, while economic journalism used fewer but strategically selected metaphorical expressions such as *“tighten one’s belt”*. This suggests that phraseological density is linked to thematic goals: political reporting seeks to dramatize conflict, while economic reporting aims to simplify complex realities for general audiences. Consequently, the findings expand our understanding of how phraseological choices are tailored to journalistic objectives.

The implications of these findings are twofold. On the one hand, from a stylistic perspective, phraseological units’ function as essential devices for constructing the tone, stance, and overall readability of journalistic texts. They do not simply decorate language

but structure meaning, provide evaluative cues, and guide interpretation. On the other hand, from a media studies perspective, their usage reveals how newspapers strategically exploit linguistic familiarity to establish authority, entertain audiences, and persuade readers.

Furthermore, the increasing reliance on idioms and proverbs in headlines demonstrates that phraseological units play a significant role in capturing attention in an age of information overload. In this regard, they can be seen as rhetorical shortcuts that condense complex arguments into familiar forms, thereby ensuring immediacy and accessibility.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that phraseological units play a central role in shaping the stylistic and communicative dimensions of newspaper discourse. By analyzing articles from leading English-language newspapers, it became clear that idioms, proverbs, and set collocations are not used randomly, but rather strategically, to enhance expressiveness, strengthen persuasion, convey evaluation, and introduce irony. Therefore, phraseological units emerge as indispensable tools of journalistic style, contributing to both textual vividness and ideological framing.

Moreover, the findings confirmed earlier scholarly perspectives, such as Kunin's emphasis on expressiveness and Moon's insights into ideological functions, while extending them by highlighting the growing prominence of ironic reinterpretations in opinion journalism. This suggests that newspapers continue to evolve in their stylistic practices, creatively adapting phraseological resources to engage increasingly diverse and critical readerships.

Equally importantly, the study revealed thematic variation: political journalism displayed the highest density of idioms, reflecting its reliance on dramatization and debate, whereas economic texts used fewer phraseological units but favored metaphorical collocations that simplified abstract concepts. Such differences underline the adaptability of phraseology to thematic and rhetorical goals.

Ultimately, this research underscores the fact that phraseological units are more than stylistic ornaments: they are dynamic linguistic instruments that allow journalists to capture attention, shape opinion, and foster cultural resonance. Hence, understanding their role is not only essential for stylistics and linguistics but also crucial for media studies, as it reveals how language continues to mediate the relationship between the press and its audiences in an era of rapid communication.

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