


The role of somatisms in polysemantic phraseological units: a cognitive and cultural feature

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Abstract: Somatisms are phraseological units containing body-related components. They play an important role in the semantic and cognitive development of language. This article studies how somatic components contribute to polysemy, analyzing their metaphorical, emotional, cognitive, and cultural aspects. Using theories from cognitive linguistics, including conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), this study explains how somatisms develop polysemantic meanings in the Uzbek and English languages. The findings show the universal and culturally specific nature of somatic components in polysemantic phraseological units (PUs).

Keywords: Somatic components, phraseological units, polysemy, cognitive linguistics, metaphorical expressions, semantic universality, cognitive metaphor theory.

Introduction: The term “somatic” was first introduced into linguistics by Estonian scholar F. Vack, who observed that body-part terms are one of the most ancient linguistic foundations of phraseology [Vack, 1950]. He argued that somatic expressions are deeply rooted in human cognition, serving as stable elements of language. Building on Vack’s work, E.M. Mordkovich introduced the concept of “phraseological somatism”, applying it to Russian phraseology. In his study “Semantic-thematic groups of somatic phraseologisms”, he categorized these expressions into cognitive, emotional, and action-oriented groups [Mordkovich, 1965].

In English linguistics, Logan Smith emphasized the enormous presence of body-part-based phraseology, arguing that it enriches figurative language [Smith, 1925]. He classified English somatic idioms into categories such as vision-related, heart-related, and hand-related expressions.

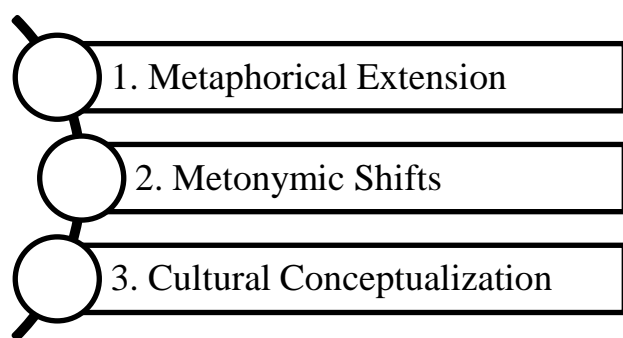
Somatic components of phraseological units include references to body parts such as the heart, head, eyes, hands, or stomach. These expressions are often polysemantic, which express multiple meanings depending on context, cultural influences, and cognitive mechanisms. Many linguists, such as Piirainen (2012), Kövecses (2002), and Wierzbicka (1999), argue that somatic phraseology reflects universal human

cognition while also being shaped by cultural interpretations. For example, Uzbek polysemantic phraseological unit “ko’ngli to’ldi” (His heart is full) illustrates how bodily metaphors create multiple meaning, ranging from satisfaction to emotional fulfillment. In this article, we try to study and analyze that how somatisms create polysemy in phraseology, the cognitive and cultural basis of phraseologisms with somatic component and comparative analysis of polysemy in phraseological units with somatisms in Uzbek and English.

In the 80s of the XX century, linguists Lakoff and Johnson introduced conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) in cognitive linguistics which examines how somatic expressions emerge from bodily experiences. A key principle of CMT is that abstract concepts are understood through bodily experience. Linguist explains that conceptual structure is meaningful because it is embodied, that is, it arises from, and is tied to, our preconceptual bodily experiences. [Lakoff, 1987: 267]. Since the body is a universal reference point, expressions related to heart, hands, and eyes are found in many languages. His theory helps explain how somatic phraseological units create polysemy. For example, the metaphor “THE HEART IS A CONTAINER FOR EMOTIONS” underlies polysemantic phraseological units in Uzbek and English cultures:

- Uzbek: Ko'ngli to'ldi (His heart is full) → Satisfaction, contentment.
 - English: My heart is full → Emotional fulfillment.

According to this universal, somatic phraseological units stem from underlying human experiences. However, their interpretation is shaped by cultures [Kövecses, 2005]. Cognitive linguists argue that polysemy arises from conceptual mappings between physical experiences and abstract meanings [Langacker, 2008: 37-38]. Kövecses studies how emotions, culture, and cognition shape language and explains that there are three cognitive mechanisms that contribute to polysemy in somatic phraseological units [Kövecses, 2002: 183-195]:



1. Metaphorical extension is that abstract emotions are described using bodily terms. For example:

- "Ko'zi ochildi" (Uzbek) → gained wisdom (literal: His eyes opened).
 - "Opened his eyes" (English) → realized the truth.

2. In metonymic shifts, a body part represents an associated emotion or action. For example:

- "Yuragi yorildi" (Uzbek) → can mean either extreme

joy or deep sorrow. - "His heart burst" (English) → overwhelmed with emotions.

3. Cultural conceptualization is another means because of polysemy can be culture-specific. For example:

- "Boshi osmonga yetdi" (Uzbek, literal: "His head reached the sky") → extreme happiness.

- "On cloud nine" (English, metaphorical equivalent) → extreme happiness. Thus, somatic expressions develop multiple meanings due to metaphorical, metonymic, and cultural shifts [Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2005: 91-93].

According to Lakoff & Johnson [1980: 30], bodily experiences shape abstract thought, leading to universal cognitive metaphors. The metaphor "THE HEART AS A CONTAINER FOR EMOTIONS" appears in multiple languages, supporting the cognitive universality of somatisms.

Wierzbicka (1999) argues that somatic phraseology reflects culturally specific worldviews. While the body is universal, its symbolic meanings vary across languages. For example:

- Uzbek: "Qo'li ochiq" (open-handed person) → generous.

- English: "Open-handed" → can mean generous but also literal openness. Such differences highlight how culture influences the semantic range of somatic phraseological units and the role of cultural symbolism in phraseology [Piirainen, 2012: 47-48].

Somatic expressions can be classified based on their functional roles in language. This classification supports the idea that somatisms contribute to polysemy by allowing multiple layers of interpretation [Kövecses, 2002: 183-195]:

Types of somatism	Definition	Example (Uzbek)	Polysemantic meanings
Metaphoric al	Uses body-related terms to represent abstract concepts	<i>Ko'ngli to'lmoq</i> (Heart is full)	Pleased: <i>Ikkovi ham o'g'illaridan ko'ngillari to'lib suhbatlashayotganlari bilinib turardi. P.Qodirov. Uch ildiz.</i> or satisfied: <i>Ishning bu tomonidan ko'ngli to'lgan Jo'raboy xotirjam dala aylanadi. S.Ahmad. Qadrdon dalalar</i>

Emotional	Expresses feelings with bodily terms	<i>Yuragi qinidan chiqmoq</i> (Heart leaps)	<p>Happiness: <i>Qizning paranjisini ko'rish bilanoq yigitning yuragi qinidan chiqayozdi. Yerga mahkam tiralgan qo'pol etikli og'ir oyoqlari bir zumda zir titrab ketdi. Oybek. Qutlug' qon.</i></p> <p>or anxiety: <i>Qo'rqmayman deb bo'lmaydi, o'g'lim, shunaqa vaqtda odamning yuragi qinidan chiqib ketdi. A.Qahhor. Qo'shchinor chiroqlari.</i></p>
Cognitive	Express awareness or knowledge	<i>Ko'zi ochilmoq</i> (Eyes opened)	<p>Realization: <i>Bo'taboy aka ko'zimni ochganlaridan keyin yangichasiga ham mashqimni raso qilish maqsadida astoydil o'qidim. A.Qahhor. Qo'shchinor chiroqlari.</i></p> <p>or being alerted: «Vey, yaxshilar, ko'zni ochaylik!» deydi biron zamonlik mard yo'g'-a!.. X.Do'stmuhammad. Jajman.</p>
Symbolic	Represents cultural features	Bag'ri keng (Open-hearted)	<p>Generosity: <i>Gap unda emas, yigit, sahromiz keng, bag'rimiz undan ham keng. H.Nazir. Odamning qadri.</i></p> <p>or welcoming: <i>Ularga shaharning bag'ri keng edi. P.Tursun. O'qituvchi.</i></p>

Action-oriented	Describes behaviours or habits with somatisms	Tilini tiymoq (Bite one's tongue)	Refraining from expressing one's opinion: « <i>Tilini tiymaganlarning tilini kes, og'ziga qo'rg'oshin eritib quy</i> », – <i>deb bitilgan!</i> » <i>S.Anorboyev. Oqsoy.</i> Stop speaking: <i>Har muddai tilini tiysa bo'lurmi, bo'lmas.</i> <i>S.Saroyi. Gulistoni bit-turkiy.</i>
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This study demonstrates that somatisms play a key role in phraseology by creating polysemy through metaphorical, emotional, and cultural extensions. While the cognitive basis of somatic expressions is universal, their linguistic realizations vary across cultures. Future research could explore how somatic phraseology evolves over time and how modern usage affects its polysemy.

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