

THE COGNITIVE-LINGUISTIC ROLE OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN CHILDREN'S SPEECH DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: This article investigates the cognitive-linguistic role of phraseological units in the process of children's speech development. Drawing on the theoretical framework of cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics, the study explores how phraseological units contribute to the formation of conceptual thinking, metaphorical cognition, and expressive speech in children. The research demonstrates that phraseological units function not merely as fixed lexical combinations but as cognitive models that facilitate the internalization of abstract meanings through imagery and conceptual metaphors. The findings highlight the importance of age-appropriate phraseological material in early language education and provide a theoretical basis for the development of pedagogically oriented phraseological dictionaries and teaching resources.

Keywords: phraseological units, cognitive linguistics, children's speech development, conceptual metaphor, psycholinguistics, figurative thinking.

Introduction: In contemporary linguistics, language is increasingly understood as a cognitive system closely linked to human conceptualization of reality rather than a purely communicative tool. This paradigm shift has significantly influenced research on language acquisition and child speech development. Within this context, phraseological units represent a particularly important linguistic phenomenon, as they embody culturally encoded knowledge, metaphorical thinking, and evaluative meanings.

Children's speech development is not limited to the acquisition of grammatical structures and isolated lexical items. It also involves mastering figurative language that enables children to conceptualize emotions, social relations, and abstract experiences. Phraseological units play a crucial role in this process by providing ready-made cognitive schemas through which children interpret and describe the world.

Despite extensive research on child language acquisition, the cognitive-linguistic potential of phraseological units in early speech development remains underexplored. This article

aims to fill this gap by analyzing phraseological units as cognitive tools that shape children's conceptual and metaphorical thinking.

The primary objective of this study is to identify and theoretically substantiate the cognitive-linguistic functions of phraseological units in children's speech development.

Methodology: The research adopts a qualitative theoretical approach grounded in cognitive linguistics and psycholinguistics. The following methods were employed:

- Cognitive-semantic analysis to identify conceptual structures underlying phraseological units;
- Conceptual metaphor analysis to examine metaphorical mappings encoded in phraseological expressions;
- Psycholinguistic interpretation to explain how children process and internalize figurative language;
- Descriptive-analytical method to systematize theoretical findings and pedagogical implications.

The methodological framework is based on key assumptions of cognitive linguistics, particularly the idea that meaning arises from embodied experience and conceptualization rather than from purely formal linguistic structures.

Results: The theoretical analysis demonstrates that phraseological units play a multidimensional cognitive-linguistic role in children's speech development. Rather than functioning merely as stylistic embellishments or peripheral lexical items, phraseological units operate as cognitive instruments that structure children's conceptualization of experience, facilitate metaphorical reasoning, and expand expressive and evaluative capacities.

From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, the acquisition of phraseological units reflects the gradual internalization of conceptual schemas through which children organize abstract knowledge. These schemas are grounded in embodied experience and culturally shared models, enabling young learners to bridge the gap between concrete perception and abstract thought. The following subsections analyze three core cognitive-linguistic functions of phraseological units in detail.

Conceptualization of Abstract Experience: One of the most significant cognitive-linguistic functions of phraseological units in children's speech development is their role in the conceptualization of abstract experience. Abstract notions such as emotions, mental states, moral qualities, and social attitudes are inherently difficult for children to grasp due

to their non-observable nature. Phraseological units address this challenge by mapping abstract domains onto concrete, embodied experiences.

Within the framework of cognitive linguistics, this process is explained through conceptual metaphor theory, according to which abstract concepts are understood via more concrete source domains derived from bodily and sensory experience. Phraseological units encode these metaphorical mappings in linguistically fixed forms, making them readily accessible to children. For instance, expressions conceptualizing emotional coldness or detachment through physical hardness or distance allow children to rely on familiar sensory knowledge to interpret abstract emotional states.

Importantly, phraseological units function as pre-packaged conceptual models. Children do not need to construct abstract meanings independently; instead, they internalize culturally established metaphorical associations embedded in language. This reduces cognitive load and supports more efficient meaning construction. As a result, phraseological units serve as cognitive shortcuts that enable children to operate with abstract concepts earlier and more confidently than would otherwise be possible.

From an educational perspective, this finding underscores the importance of carefully selected phraseological material in early language education. Age-appropriate phraseological units can scaffold children's understanding of complex concepts, provided that they are introduced in meaningful contexts and supported by appropriate explanation.

Development of Metaphorical Thinking: A second key finding concerns the role of phraseological units in the development of metaphorical thinking, which constitutes a core component of higher-order cognition. Metaphorical thinking allows individuals to perceive similarities across different domains of experience and to reason abstractly by means of analogy. In cognitive development, the emergence of metaphorical thinking marks a critical transition from literal to abstract modes of thought.

Phraseological units are inherently metaphorical in nature. Their meanings cannot be derived through literal interpretation but require recognition of underlying conceptual mappings. When children encounter and interpret phraseological units, they engage in cognitive processes that involve mapping, inference, and abstraction. Through repeated exposure, these processes become internalized, contributing to the gradual development of metaphorical competence.

Unlike spontaneous metaphors created in discourse, phraseological units represent conventionalized metaphors that have been stabilized through cultural usage. This conventionalization makes them particularly suitable for children, as it reduces interpretive

ambiguity. At the same time, it exposes children to culturally dominant ways of structuring experience, thereby shaping their cognitive worldview.

The acquisition of phraseological units thus fosters not only linguistic competence but also conceptual flexibility. Children learn that meaning is not always literal and that language can represent reality in indirect, figurative ways. This insight is foundational for later academic skills, including abstract reasoning, literary interpretation, and critical thinking.

Enhancement of Expressive and Evaluative Speech: The third major cognitive-linguistic function identified in the analysis is the contribution of phraseological units to the enhancement of expressive and evaluative speech. Expressive competence involves the ability to articulate emotions, attitudes, and evaluations in a nuanced and socially appropriate manner. For children, developing such competence is essential for effective communication and social interaction.

Phraseological units provide children with linguistically economical means of expressing complex evaluative meanings. Rather than relying on lengthy explanations, children can employ phraseological expressions that encapsulate attitudes such as approval, disapproval, irony, or emotional intensity. In this sense, phraseological units function as pragmatic tools that enrich communicative repertoire.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, the use of phraseological units supports the development of pragmatic awareness. Children learn not only what certain expressions mean but also when and how they are appropriately used. This contributes to the formation of discourse competence and social sensitivity.

Moreover, evaluative phraseological units often encode culturally specific norms and value judgments. Through their acquisition, children internalize socially shared evaluative frameworks, which play a crucial role in socialization. Language thus becomes a medium through which cultural attitudes are transmitted and reinforced.

In educational contexts, this finding highlights the importance of integrating phraseological material into language instruction not merely as lexical enrichment but as a means of supporting expressive and pragmatic development.

Transmission of Cultural Cognitive Models: An additional and highly significant cognitive-linguistic function of phraseological units in children's speech development lies in their role in the transmission of cultural cognitive models. Phraseological units are not culturally neutral linguistic forms; rather, they encapsulate historically shaped patterns of perception, evaluation, and social experience that are shared within a linguistic community. Through phraseology, language serves as a repository of collective cognition.

From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, cultural cognitive models can be understood as structured mental representations that guide interpretation and behavior within a given society. These models are encoded in language through conventional metaphors, evaluative expressions, and idiomatic constructions. When children acquire phraseological units, they simultaneously acquire access to these culturally embedded models of reality.

Phraseological units thus function as vehicles of cultural cognition. They transmit socially sanctioned ways of conceptualizing emotions, interpersonal relations, moral values, and social roles. For example, phraseological expressions that conceptualize diligence, laziness, honesty, or deceit implicitly communicate cultural norms regarding desirable and undesirable behavior. Children, through repeated exposure and use, internalize these norms as part of their developing cognitive and moral framework.

Importantly, this transmission process is largely implicit. Children do not consciously analyze the cultural meanings encoded in phraseological units; rather, they assimilate them through use in communicative contexts. This implicit nature makes phraseological units particularly powerful tools of socialization, as they shape cognitive and evaluative orientations without explicit instruction.

In bilingual and multilingual contexts, the cultural dimension of phraseological units becomes especially salient. Differences in phraseological imagery across languages reflect divergent cultural cognitive models. For children using bilingual dictionaries, explanation-based and context-oriented definitions are therefore essential to mediate not only linguistic meaning but also cultural perspective. Without such mediation, phraseological units risk being reduced to formal equivalents devoid of their cultural and conceptual depth.

Discussion: The theoretical analysis presented in this study confirms that phraseological units occupy a central position in children's cognitive and linguistic development. Far from being peripheral stylistic elements, phraseological units function as cognitive-conceptual structures that support abstraction, metaphorical reasoning, expressive competence, and cultural socialization.

From a cognitive-linguistic standpoint, the findings align with the view that language acquisition is inseparable from conceptual development. Children do not merely learn words and grammatical patterns; they gradually construct networks of meaning grounded in embodied experience and shaped by cultural conventions. Phraseological units accelerate this process by offering linguistically compressed representations of complex conceptual relations.

The discussion also highlights the limitations of traditional lexicographic approaches that treat phraseological units primarily as translation problems. In children's bilingual dictionaries, translation-only strategies fail to address the cognitive, pragmatic, and cultural dimensions of phraseological meaning. Such strategies may provide formal correspondence but do little to support conceptual understanding or appropriate usage.

In contrast, explanation-based and cognitively informed definitional strategies align more closely with children's learning mechanisms. By foregrounding imagery, context, and conceptual motivation, these strategies transform dictionaries into cognitive scaffolding tools rather than passive repositories of lexical information. This reconceptualization has important implications for educational lexicography.

The discussion further suggests that phraseological competence should be regarded as an integral component of communicative competence from the earliest stages of language education. Delaying exposure to phraseological units until advanced levels deprives children of valuable cognitive resources that facilitate abstract thinking and expressive precision.

At a broader theoretical level, the analysis supports the integration of cognitive linguistics into lexicographic theory. Dictionaries-especially those designed for children-should be grounded in models of meaning that reflect how language is actually processed and internalized, rather than relying exclusively on formal or structural descriptions.

Conclusion: his study has provided a comprehensive cognitive-linguistic analysis of the role of phraseological units in children's speech development, with particular attention to their conceptual, metaphorical, expressive, and cultural functions. The findings demonstrate that phraseological units are not marginal linguistic phenomena but central components of children's emerging cognitive and communicative systems.

By conceptualizing phraseological units as cognitive models, the study advances a theoretical framework that explains how children use figurative language to structure abstract experience, develop metaphorical thinking, enhance expressive and evaluative speech, and internalize culturally shared modes of interpretation. These processes occur through interaction with conventionalized linguistic forms that embody collective cognitive experience.

The analysis has important implications for educational practice and lexicographic design. Children's bilingual dictionaries must move beyond translation-centered approaches and adopt definitional strategies grounded in cognitive accessibility, contextualization, and cultural mediation. Such dictionaries can play an active role in language education by supporting both linguistic and conceptual development.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the growing body of research that situates phraseology at the intersection of language, cognition, and culture. It underscores the value of cognitive-linguistic theory as a foundation for educational lexicography and highlights the need for interdisciplinary collaboration between linguists, lexicographers, and educators.

Future research may extend this theoretical framework through empirical investigation, cross-linguistic comparison, and the exploration of digital and multimodal dictionary environments. Nevertheless, the present study establishes a solid conceptual basis for understanding phraseological units as powerful cognitive instruments in children's language development.

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