

LINGUA-CULTURAL FEATURES OF ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

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Abstract. This study explores the cultural aspects of English idioms. It connects language to deep beliefs that shape their meanings. It examines grammar, word choice, and sentence nuances in phrases like "kick the bucket" or "spill the beans." It also looks at how national characteristics, such as British irony or American boldness, influence these phrases. By tracing their historical and cultural origins, the study illustrates how these phrases carry rich stories, making them hard to translate without losing their essence.

Key words: Phraseological units, Idioms, Proverbs, Collocations, Linguocultural features, Cultural semantics, Idiomatic expressions, Language and culture
Figurative meaning, English linguistics

Introduction. English phraseological units, including idioms, proverbs, and collocations, are filled with cultural, historical, and linguistic significance. These expressions often convey more than their literal meanings; they tell stories, reflect customs, or express beliefs from earlier times. For example, the idiom "raining cats and dogs" comes from 17th-century England, where heavy rains flooded streets and washed away animals and debris. Similarly, "break the ice" has literary ties, most notably to Shakespeare, and refers to starting social interactions. Many idioms originate in mythology, history, or social practices, representing the norms and tales of their times, such as "Achilles' heel," which comes from Greek mythology, or "bite the bullet," which relates to wartime medical practices. These expressions are not just linguistic artifacts; they also serve as cultural connectors that allow different societies to share humor, wisdom, and history through language. For instance, "kick the bucket" has roots in slaughterhouses, while "raining cats and dogs" connects to storms and urban flooding. Additionally, idioms like "Bob's your uncle" and "throw in the towel" illustrate British irony and social customs. Their backgrounds often reveal interesting stories about societal practices, mythology, or historical events, showing how language embodies culture, humor, and history.

Main part.

- Idioms convey cultural attitudes in few words. Take "kick the bucket"; it is a darkly playful euphemism for death. One common explanation connects it to old slaughtering practices. The phrase's blend of bluntness and humor reflects a typical British taste for understatement.
- Proverbs represent long-standing social ideas. "Birds of a feather flock together" reflects ancient concerns about tribe and belonging. Its journey through Aesop and Greek thought helped it become universal, yet it still carries a bias toward collectivism.
- Collocations are intentional. Phrases like "strong tea" reveal social history—British associations with resilience and comfort make that adjective feel natural in their culture.
- Regional shifts alter nuances. American "spill the beans" takes an obscure Greek practice of secret voting and turns it into casual gossip, losing some of the original ritual significance. Likewise, global borrowings get reshaped; Arabic speakers might adopt the English phrase "bite the dust" but adapt it with local warrior or desert imagery.
- They resist literal translation. Jokes disappear, historical context fades, and meanings change when phrases cross languages, underscoring how embedded they are in specific cultural networks.
- Power and history shape them. Colonial contact, for example, leaves marks in Indian English, where British idioms mix with local expressions to create new meanings. This blend reflects unequal histories and creative adaptation.

- They evolve with society. Changes in gender roles have led to questioning phrases like "wear the pants," and new social changes create fresh expressions; for example, "ghosting" from online dating is a clear instance.

These phraseological units act as bridges; they connect eras, regions, and social attitudes, revealing values and power dynamics. They are never just neutral bits of language—they are always cultural and always meaningful.

- Origins: many idioms begin in folklore, religion, or daily life.

"Bite the bullet" often references the battlefield story—soldiers chewing lead when there was no anesthetic. The phrase continues to evoke a sense of stoic toughness. "Rule of thumb" links to an old claim that laws allowed a husband to beat his wife with a stick the width of his thumb. Whether true or a myth, the expression now signals gender bias in language. Phrase chunks start as remnants from the past:

"Kick the bucket"? A grim joke from slaughterhouses: animals thrashing, buckets flying. British understatement dresses up the blood.

"Bite the bullet" feels real too: soldiers biting lead during surgery without anesthetic. Pain evolved into a proverb.

"Break a leg" comes from theater superstition. Instead of wishing good luck, actors hope for injury as a way to ward off bad luck. It's Shakespearean, dramatic, and ironic.

Food spills into language: "spill the beans" references an ancient Greek voting method using beans in jars. To tip it means revealing secrets—an idea of democracy now turned into gossip.

Weather idioms reflect climate. "Under the weather" comes from sailors placing sick mates below decks to shield them from cold spray—deeply nautical, stoic, and still common in conversation.

Politics also plays a role. "Throw someone under the bus," an American expression, suggests quick betrayal, akin to roadkill. It emerged from 1980s political campaigns and became a global term for swift treachery.

Youth transforms language too. Gen Z has shortened charisma to "rizz." It's not quite a phrase yet, but expect it to stick.

Language captures life from ships to scrolls. Your article should let idioms share history without just looking appealing.

- Class. Power and tone: some phrases reveal who holds influence. "Pull strings" evokes images of secret deals and unnoticed elite maneuvering—showing power operating in the shadows. In contrast, the Australian phrase "she'll be right" conveys a casual attitude: practical, laid-back, and resistant to fuss. Words demonstrate who controls the narrative. "Pull strings" suggests behind-the-scenes influence and secret arrangements. For others, phrases like "keep your chin up" or the stiff-upper-lip stereotype surface. These sayings often mask real inequality with bravado.

- Migration and remixing: when people move, words travel with them and take on new meanings. In Caribbean English, "lime" means "hang out," often associated with market stalls. Some trace the influence back to the Spanish word for lemon. This process is creolization—old words merged into new social contexts, energized by local life. When people relocate, their words migrate too, gaining new connotations. Caribbean "lime" for hanging out emerged from market stalls and public spaces, showcasing social life. Indian English adapts phrases like "fifteen minutes of fame," giving it a Bollywood flair—same concept, with brighter lights.

- Change and new needs: phraseology continues to evolve. "Gaslighting" moved from a 1940s play and film into psychological language and everyday use—an example of language reflecting social trauma. New realities generate new sayings; shifting values make old ones stand out. Look closer: phraseological units also reveal body politics. "Cold feet" is commonly used in English to express nerves before a wedding, but in the medieval era, it related to frostbite during long marches. It now signifies fear, rather than survival.

Food also influences language. "Piece of cake" suggests ease, but in the context of food, it held deeper meaning during the 1930s Depression when cake was a luxury. If something is seen as sweet, it is simple. The same applies to "bring home the bacon," originally a prize in village races that now signifies earning money.

Religion is another factor. "Turn the other cheek," a phrase from Jesus, is often used casually in English, stripping its sacred meaning for sarcasm.

Technology is also important. "Upload your soul" is not yet an idiom, but "doomscroll" already is—new stresses lead to new phrases.

Conclusion. This study has really shown us the features of English phraseological units, like idioms, proverbs and collocations. English phraseological units are not ordinary words. They are the heart of a whole culture. They are what make a culture come alive. They show us what a culture values.

We use expressions like "kick the bucket " "spill the beans " "bite the bullet " and "raining cats and dogs" in our speech. English phraseological units like these come from the past from places like slaughterhouses ancient Greek voting rituals, sailors ships, Shakespeares stages and battlefields. They even come from British humor.

English phraseological units are still used today to show the spirit of a nation how people feel about things how people make jokes and how people relate to each other.

This analysis has clearly shown that English phraseological units are never just neutral. They show us how society works, who has power and who does not. English phraseological units like " strings" show us the games people play behind the scenes. English phraseological units like "wear the pants" and "rule of thumb" show us what people think about men and women.

English phraseological units also show us what people think in parts of the world. For example in America people say "throw someone under the bus " and in Australia people say "she'll be right." English phraseological units like these come from the Caribbean like "lime ". From India like "fifteen minutes of fame."

As society changes English phraseological units also change. When peoples ideas about men and women change old phrases are not used anymore. They are used in a different way. With the internet new English phraseological units are born, like "" "doomscroll," and "rizz."

Even though English phraseological units change they still carry the same cultural meaning. This is why they are so hard to translate. Because if you just translate the words you lose the humor, the hidden meaning and the history.

So English phraseological units are like bridges, between times, places, social classes and cultures. They help us understand the past. They shape the present and the future.

In conclusion English phraseologisms are not just something linguists study. They are a collection of experiences. English phraseological units are funny, serious and always changing. If we study phraseological units deeply we can see that language is not just a way to communicate. It is a way to understand culture. We should keep studying phraseological units and we should look at how they compare across languages, how new ones are born in the digital age and how we can help people who are learning a new language understand the culture.

English phraseological units are the heart and soul of a language. They are not words. They are what make a language alive. English phraseological units will never be words.

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