

Symbolic Representation of Human Intellectual Abilities in English And Russian Phraseology

Marina Aleksandrovna Balyasnikova

Senior Lecturer, Department of English Lexicology and Stylistics, Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages, Samarkand, Uzbekistan

Korableva Ekaterina Alekseevna

Tula State Pedagogical University named after Leo Tolstoy, Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This study examines the symbolic foundations of English and Russian phraseological units characterizing human intellectual abilities. Phraseological units are regarded as important carriers of cultural knowledge, collective experience, and national worldviews. The research aims to identify the principal symbolic models underlying the representation of intelligence, wisdom, foolishness, memory, knowledge acquisition, and mental activity in English and Russian phraseology. The material consists of phraseological units collected from English and Russian phraseological dictionaries and literary texts. The study employs semantic, componential, comparative, and linguocultural methods of analysis. The findings reveal several major phraseo-semantic groups associated with intellectual abilities, including intelligence, foolishness, limited intellectual capacity, memory, knowledge, and thinking processes. The analysis demonstrates that phraseological meaning is largely structured through symbolic images such as the head and brain as centers of cognition, vision as a metaphor for understanding, light as a symbol of wisdom, machinery as a model of cognitive organization, and authority as a representation of rational control. Comparative analysis indicates the presence of both universal cognitive patterns and culture-specific symbolic associations in English and Russian phraseological systems. The study confirms that phraseology functions as a repository of cultural symbolism and contributes to the preservation and transmission of culturally embedded conceptualizations of intellectual activity.

Keywords: Phraseology, phraseological units (PUs), symbolism, linguistic symbolism, conceptualization, linguocultural studies, phraseo-semantic groups, metaphorical models, comparative linguistics, cognitive linguistics.

Introduction: Phraseology represents a unique domain of language in which national and cultural patterns of worldview are manifested most vividly. Phraseological units preserve collective experience, cultural stereotypes, symbolic meanings, and value orientations accumulated over centuries. Due to their figurative nature and semantic stability, phraseological units serve as an important source of information about the interaction between language, culture, and cognition.

Particular attention has recently been devoted to phraseological units characterizing human intellectual abilities. Such expressions reveal culturally embedded perceptions of intelligence, wisdom, foolishness, memory, knowledge acquisition, and mental activity. Their meanings are frequently constructed through symbolic and metaphorical models reflecting both universal cognitive mechanisms and culture-specific interpretations of human cognition.

In English and Russian phraseology, intellectual abilities

are commonly conceptualized through symbols associated with the head, brain, vision, machinery, space, and social hierarchy. The head traditionally functions as a universal symbol of reason and consciousness, while the brain symbolizes intellectual potential. Visual perception often represents understanding and foresight, whereas mechanical imagery reflects the organization of cognitive processes. Such symbolic associations demonstrate the close relationship between phraseological meaning and cultural models of thought.

The study of symbolism occupies an important place in contemporary linguistics, cognitive linguistics, and linguocultural studies. Symbols function as culturally significant signs that accumulate collective knowledge and cultural experience. Unlike ordinary metaphorical images, symbols possess a relatively stable cultural interpretation and are deeply rooted in national consciousness. Within phraseological studies, symbolism has attracted considerable scholarly attention because phraseological units preserve cultural representations and symbolic models that continue to shape linguistic worldviews. Comparative analysis of English and Russian phraseological units makes it possible to identify both universal and nationally specific mechanisms underlying the representation of intellectual abilities.

METHODS

The research material consists of English and Russian phraseological units characterizing intellectual abilities. The data were collected from English and Russian phraseological dictionaries and literary texts illustrating authentic usage.

The study employs semantic analysis, componential analysis, comparative analysis, and linguocultural interpretation. Semantic analysis was used to identify phraseo-semantic groups and determine their evaluative meanings. Componential analysis made it possible to reveal the semantic features underlying phraseological meaning. Comparative analysis was applied to establish similarities and differences between English and Russian phraseological systems. Linguocultural interpretation was used to identify symbolic images and cultural meanings embedded in phraseological units.

Special attention was paid to symbolic components of

meaning and to metaphorical mechanisms contributing to the conceptualization of intellectual qualities in both languages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Several phraseological units possess the generalized meaning of intellectual abilities, including **one's (the) upper storey(s)** ('mind, brains'), **turn of mind** ('cast of mind'), **gray (grey) matter** ('brains, intellect'), and **царь в голове** ('sound judgment, intelligence'). For example: He was shrewd, secret and merry of a Rabelaisian turn of mind... (АРФС).

Many phraseological units belonging to this group are based on the symbolism of the head as the center of reason and intellectual activity. The components **head**, **brain**, **голова**, and **мозги** function not merely as somatic designations but also as cultural symbols of thought, consciousness, and cognition. The metaphorical representation of intellectual qualities through the image of the head reflects the anthropocentric nature of the linguistic worldview. More generally, the symbolism of the head originates from the universal tendency to conceptualize mental activity through bodily experience. Consequently, the head becomes a symbolic container of knowledge, memory, and rational control.

The largest phraseo-semantic subgroup comprises phraseological units denoting foolishness, including **have got apartments to let; not to have (got) a brain in one's head; a proper Charley; cousin Betty; dead from the neck up (dead above the ears); dump Dora; long hair and short wit; винтиков (клепок) не хватает (в голове); богом убитый; солома в голове; пень березовый; олух царя небесного; and мозги набекрень**. This subgroup also includes a number of proverbs such as **A fool's bolt may sometimes hit the mark; As the fool thinks, so the bell clinks; A fool and his money are soon parted; Дуракам везет; and Смех без причины — признак дурачины**. Consider the following examples: When he stopped speaking his mouth hung open showing the tongue lolling just inside the lips. I realized that he was **weak in the head** (АРФС); Well, he's got a bad ear for music, Joshua. When people wave **wooden heads**, you know, it can't be helped (АРФС); Блохин внимательно выслушивал все эти наставления ротмистра, поддакивал, кивал в знак согласия головой. Сам же думал: "Эх ты, **дубина**

стоеросовая, дальше своего носа не видишь” (ФСРЯ); — А почему самого цивилизованного не задержал? Это же мятежник был, понимаешь, дурья голова, — топнул от возмущения ногой офицер. — Отвечай, где он? (ФСРЯ).

Phraseological units characterizing foolishness are frequently based on ironic and depreciative symbolism. Images such as straw, emptiness, wood, and missing screws symbolically represent the absence of rational order and intellectual coherence. Mechanical imagery is particularly significant because it conceptualizes the human mind as a functioning mechanism whose effectiveness depends on the presence of all its components. Missing screws metaphorically signify defective thinking and cognitive dysfunction.

Phraseological units with positive evaluative connotations characterize intelligence and wisdom. These include **all there; have more brains in one's little finger than one has in his whole body; clever Dick; a clever dog; a clever head; с царем в голове; семи пядей во лбу; ума палата; иметь голову на плечах; с головой**; and **светлая голова**. The following contexts illustrate their use: You appear **to have an old head upon very young shoulders**; at one moment to be a scampish boy ... and at another a resolute ... man (АРФС); — У меня своя **голова на плечах**, — сказал Беридзе. — Я не намерен во всем слушаться ваших немецких и американских авторитетов (ФСРЯ).

Particularly interesting is the symbolic structure of the phraseological unit **с царем в голове**. The image of the tsar functions as a symbol of authority, order, discipline, and rational control. Through this symbolism, the human mind is conceptualized as an organized domain governed by reason. The symbolism of light also plays an important role in this subgroup. The phraseological unit **светлая голова** reflects a long-standing cultural tradition linking light with wisdom, truth, and intellectual clarity. Similar symbolic associations can be found throughout European culture, where light traditionally represents knowledge and enlightenment.

Another phraseo-semantic subgroup includes phraseological units denoting limited intellectual capacity, such as **be (run) in blinkers; wear blinkers; have a bad (no) head for something; a one-track mind; не видеть дальше своего носа; пороха не**

выдумает; and богом обиженный. For example: Roger was a great reader too, but he only read what immediately concerned his job; he had a **one-track mind**... (W. Maugham). Likewise, Генерал-квартирмейстером Кутузов назначил генерал-майора Вистицкого..., который занимал эту должность во 2-й армии Багратиона. Все знали, что Вистицкий **звезд с неба не хватает**, что он самый старый в квартирмейстерской части и что он будет только ширмой (ФСРЯ).

The symbolic basis of these units is connected with restricted vision and limited space. The inability to think broadly is metaphorically represented as an inability to see beyond one's immediate surroundings. Consequently, intellectual limitation is conceptualized through spatial restriction and narrowed perspective.

The subgroup characterizing memory includes **like a sieve; have a head like a sieve; дырявая голова; выживать из памяти**; and **живая летопись**. The symbolism of the sieve is particularly expressive because it allows substances to pass through openings and therefore serves as a metaphor for forgetfulness and memory loss. In contrast, the expression **живая летопись** conceptualizes memory as a repository of historical knowledge and collective experience.

Phraseological units denoting knowledge and the ability to acquire knowledge include **mental furniture (furniture of one's mind); a walking encyclopedia; have something at one's fingertips; a walking dictionary; have swallowed a dictionary; ходячий университет**; and **знать как свои пять пальцев**. Their usage is illustrated by the following examples: “You're a wide-awake young fellow,” said Cartwright, at last. “**Learn the ropes** here and make yourself useful, and I'll see you're not passed over” (АРФС); Кстати, где-то около Луги проф. Манассеин нанял себе дачу. Будем приглашать его на консилиум и конфузиться перед **бездной его премудрости** (ФСРЯ).

These phraseological units reveal symbolic conceptualizations of knowledge as an object that can be accumulated, stored, carried, and readily accessed. Images such as encyclopedia, dictionary, and furniture portray the human mind as a repository of intellectual resources.

An important subgroup consists of phraseological units characterizing mental activity, including **chew the cud**

(of reflection); look before and after; put that and that together; put two and two together; think aloud; think out loud; think better; think twice; absorbed in thought; collect one's thoughts; шевелить мозгами; уложить в голове; собираться с мыслями; раскидывать умом; раскидывать мозгами; and держать в уме. Consider the following examples: On **taking thought** it seemed to me that I must aim at lucidity, simplicity and euphony (W. Maugham); Bob didn't finish his algebra homework because his mind kept **jumping the track** to think about the new girl in class (АРФС); Я посмотрела на них в недоумении и никак не могла **взять в толк**, зачем они тут сидят, молчат и только смотрят друг на друга (ФСРЯ).

These phraseological units conceptualize thinking as movement, manipulation, organization, and physical activity. Mental processes are represented through embodied actions, emphasizing the close connection between cognition and human experience. With the exception of phraseological units denoting observation and vivid imagination, which were identified only in English, all major phraseo-semantic groups are represented in both English and Russian.

CONCLUSION

The analysis has demonstrated that English and Russian phraseological units characterizing intellectual abilities constitute a complex system of symbolic representations reflecting human cognition and cultural values. The phraseological material reveals several major semantic groups associated with intelligence, wisdom, foolishness, limited intellectual capacity, memory, knowledge acquisition, and mental activity.

The findings indicate that symbolism plays a fundamental role in the formation of phraseological meaning. The most productive symbolic models are associated with the head and brain as centers of cognition, vision as a metaphor for understanding and foresight, light as a symbol of wisdom and knowledge, machinery as a model of cognitive organization, and authority represented by the image of the ruler governing the mind.

Comparative analysis demonstrates the existence of numerous universal cognitive patterns shared by English and Russian phraseology. At the same time, each language exhibits culture-specific symbolic

associations reflecting particular historical and cultural traditions. Thus, phraseology functions not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a repository of cultural symbolism. The study of symbolic foundations underlying phraseological units contributes to a deeper understanding of national linguistic worldviews and mechanisms of conceptualizing intellectual activity.

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