

Facial Expressions and Mimics as A Semiotic System: A Linguocultural Analysis of Structure and Meaning

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Received: 28 February 2025; **Accepted:** 24 March 2025; **Published:** 28 April 2025

Abstract: The present study explores the structure and semantic characteristics of the linguistic and cultural field "facial expressions–mimics". The research focuses on how facial expressions are verbalized through lexical units, phraseological constructions, and idiomatic expressions that encode nonverbal emotional signals. The analysis reveals that facial expressions serve as a culturally conditioned channel of communication, reflecting both universal human emotions and language-specific conceptualizations. By examining the lexical semantics and cognitive metaphors underlying expressions such as raise an eyebrow, give someone the evil eye, and grit one's teeth, the study demonstrates how speakers linguistically represent emotions like surprise, anger, fear, and confusion. Special attention is paid to the interaction between verbal and nonverbal modes of communication and to the role of the face as a culturally salient domain in English-speaking contexts. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the interrelation between language, culture, and emotion, and offer implications for cross-cultural communication and language teaching.

Keywords: Linguistic and cultural field, nonverbal communication, phraseology, emotion verbalization, English language, cognitive semantics, intercultural communication, idiomatic expressions.

Introduction: Non-verbal communication encompasses such means as gestures, facial expressions, and even certain sounds, which, however, are not considered words. With their help, it is possible to carry out a communicative act without using verbal speech. Almost every language has its own non-verbal means of communication. Among them, facial expressions occupy one of the key places. A person's face plays an important role in conveying not only thoughts and intentions, but also emotions. According to the definition in explanatory dictionaries, facial expressions are movements of the facial muscles that reflect the inner psycho—emotional state of a person. Researcher V. P. Trusov notes that the face is a leading and at the same time very complex channel of non-verbal communication, capable of transmitting emotional shades of utterance, as well as controlling the process of interaction between communication participants. [1, p.32]

Of particular interest to facial expressions from the point of view of linguistics is the fact that some

expressions of emotions (for example, anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise, as well as to a lesser extent contempt, embarrassment, interest, pain and shame) can be biologically conditioned and expressed in a similar way in different cultures. This contradicts the view that facial expressions are solely the result of social and cultural learning.

METHODOLOGY

Charles Darwin was one of the first to suggest that a number of emotional expressions on the face have an evolutionary origin. For social creatures such as humans or chimpanzees, expressing emotions through facial expressions played a vital role, allowing them to avoid conflict, indicate intentions, and establish trust in the community. Nevertheless, even innate facial expressions can change under the influence of social upbringing and cultural norms. Different societies form their own "rules of expression" — ways of controlling facial expressions and gestures, depending on the context. These differences can cause misunderstandings between representatives of

different cultures, especially in the absence of knowledge about the cultural specifics of the interlocutor.

According to E. M. Vereshchagin and V. G. Kostomarov, "if teaching foreign languages involves the formation of a full-fledged communicative competence, then non-verbal means of information transmission cannot be excluded from this process. [2, p.67] The interest in them is also due to the fact that they usually have stable verbal descriptions that form a whole layer of the language system." This confirms the relevance of studying facial expressions in different cultures and languages from a linguistic point of view.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

In the phraseology of the English language, associated with facial expressions of emotions, there are often names of parts of the face, such as "eyes", "mouth", "eyebrows", "teeth", "lips" and "ears". These vocabulary elements make it possible to describe the emotions reflected on a person's face and reveal the cultural features of the verbalization of feelings.

In his work, Zhang Lan offers a classification of facial expressions into 15 emotional categories: love, joy, envy, surprise, embarrassment, anger, fear, sadness, despair, calmness, anxiety, disgust, contempt, arrogance and bewilderment. [3, p.76] This study examines three categories: joy, anger, and surprise, using examples from English phraseology.

Joy

Smile from ear to ear	– smile broadly with joy
<i>She was smiling from ear to ear when she got the job offer. (She was smiling from ear to ear when she received the job offer.)</i>	
Be all smiles	– glow with happiness
<i>He was all smiles after hearing the good news. (He was beaming with joy when he heard the good news.)</i>	
Grin like a Cheshire cat	– smug, smile broadly
<i>She was grinning like a Cheshire cat after pulling off the prank. (She was grinning like a Cheshire cat after her prank.)</i>	
Beam with joy	– glow with joy
<i>He beamed with joy as he watched his daughter graduate. (He was beaming with happiness as he watched his daughter receive her diploma.)</i>	

As can be seen from these examples, when expressing joy in English, lexemes associated with a smile, mouth, teeth, and face are actively used. This indicates that in English-speaking culture, as in many others, a smile is a universal marker of positive emotions. Researcher S.

Ya. Kosyakova emphasizes that "a smile is a sign of benevolence and positive communication. Sincerity and openness are characteristic of Russian communicative culture [4, p.103]. A smile reflects a state of mental comfort, contentment, and well-being."

Anger

Grit one's teeth –	gnashing your teeth out of anger or effort
<i>He gritted his teeth and tried not to argue. (He gritted his teeth and tried not to get into an argument.)</i>	
Talk through clenched teeth –	talk through your teeth
<i>He was all smiles after hearing the good news. (He was beaming with joy when he heard the good news.)</i>	
Grin like a Cheshire cat	– smug, smile broadly
<i>"Don't push your luck," she said through clenched teeth. ("Don't push your luck," she said through gritted teeth.)</i>	
Furrow one's brows	– furrow your brows
<i>He furrowed his brows as he read the rude email. (He frowned as he read the rude letter.)</i>	
Give someone a dirty look – look with condemnation	
<i>She gave him a dirty look after he interrupted her. (She shot him a disapproving look after he interrupted her.)</i>	

These expressions show how, in English phraseology, the facial expressions of anger and irritation are described through the tension of the facial muscles: jaws, eyebrows, eyes. Similar lexemes are found in Russian phraseology, which indicates the universality of some non-verbal expressions. An analysis of the above-mentioned English phraseological units allows us to conclude that stable expressions containing lexemes denoting eyes, gaze, eyebrows and teeth are often

used to express emotions such as anger and indignation.

The eyes, as a rule, serve as the primary and involuntary indicator of an emotional state. In the English cultural tradition, the eyes are also considered an important tool for expressing feelings, as evidenced by the many idioms associated with eye contact. For example, the expression "look daggers at someone" indicates a marked hostility or dislike that a person does not even

try to hide. Another example is "give someone a dirty look", which means to express disapproval with just a glance. These phraseological units demonstrate how significant it is in English to express emotions through a look, similar to the Russian expression "look like a wolf." It is also typical to use the teeth lexeme as part of expressions reflecting internal tension or suppressed anger. For example, the idiom "grit one's teeth" indicates an effort to contain emotions or overcome irritation. And "talk through clenched teeth" means restrained but noticeable aggression. These expressions also carry a negative emotional connotation and convey a state of suppressed discontent.

Now let's turn to the emotion of surprise.

Surprise

Drop one's jaw – get so surprised that your jaw drops

When she heard the news, her jaw dropped.

(When she heard the news, her jaw dropped.)

Eyes pop out of one's head – to be in utter amazement

His eyes nearly popped out of his head when he saw the price.

(His eyes almost popped out of his head when he saw the price.)

Raise one's eyebrows – express surprise, skepticism or interest

She raised her eyebrows at his strange request.

(She raised her eyebrows at his strange request.)

Be open-mouthed – stand with your mouth open in surprise

The crowd stood open-mouthed as the magician performed his trick.

(The crowd stood with their mouths open, watching the magician.)

These examples show that in English, the emotion of surprise is also expressed using phraseological units that involve parts of the face such as the mouth, eyes, and eyebrows. These expressions are associated with characteristic physiological manifestations – wide-open mouth, bulging eyes, raised eyebrows - which indicates an immediate and often involuntary expression of intense amazement.

Like the Russian language, in English phraseology, the eyes remain the "mirror of the soul", involuntarily conveying the inner emotional state, even if a person tries to hide it. The emotion of surprise, like anger, is expressed primarily through facial changes in the front of the head, including movements of the mouth, eyes, and eyebrows. These actions can be classified as symptomatic gestures – those that are not realized by

the speaker and are directly related to an emotional reaction.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of phraseological units containing facial components shows that both Russian and English use stable expressions based on visual elements of the face, such as eyes, mouth, eyebrows, and teeth, to express emotions such as anger and surprise. This indicates a close connection between facial expressions and the language system.

Given the cultural differences and similarities in the perception of facial expressions, it can be argued that the study of phraseological phrases related to non-verbal communication is valuable not only from a linguistic, but also from a cultural point of view. Awareness of the peculiarities of facial expressions and their reflection in language contributes to a deeper understanding of the interlocutor and to the improvement of intercultural communication. This is especially important for foreign language learners, as it allows them to perceive not only the verbal, but also the non-verbal level of communication.

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