

PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH: REFLECTIONS OF WOMEN'S ROLES IN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Language reflects the culture, values, and traditions of a society. One of the richest sources of cultural meaning is found in phraseological units — fixed expressions such as idioms, proverbs, and sayings. This article explores how phraseological units in Uzbek and English reflect social attitudes toward women and their roles in family and society. By analyzing similarities and differences in meaning, structure, and connotation, the article highlights how language captures both universal and culture-specific perceptions of femininity, work, family duties, and social expectations. The findings suggest that while both Uzbek and English phraseology historically reflect patriarchal views, modern usage shows signs of change as gender equality becomes a shared global value.

Key words: culture, values, social norms, Phraseological units, idioms, proverbs, gender

INTRODUCTION

Language and culture cannot be separated - the worldview and social norms of people can be seen in the way they speak in their daily life. Phraseological units — which include idioms, proverbs, and set expressions — offer particularly rich insights into cultural attitudes because they preserve historical and social experiences in compact linguistic forms (Koonin, 2000). In both Uzbek and English, phraseological expressions related to women provide a linguistic lens through which we can observe the cultural construction of gender roles.

In traditional societies, women were often associated with domestic life, beauty, and morality. Consequently, many idioms and sayings reflect these values. However, as societies evolve, some expressions become outdated or gain new interpretations.

The aim of this paper is to compare phraseological units in Uzbek and English that describe women's roles, analyzing them linguistically and culturally. The essay will also discuss semantic fields, metaphorical imagery, and cultural connotations, showing how each language both reinforces and challenges gender stereotypes with relevant examples.

The Nature of Phraseological Units

Phraseological units (PUs) are stable combinations of words with figurative meaning that cannot be fully understood by translating each word literally. Examples in English include expressions such as “to wear the pants” (to be dominant) or “behind every successful man there is a woman.” In Uzbek, similar fixed expressions like “Erning yuzi — xotinining yuzi” (literally: “A man's face is his wife's face”) convey moral and social expectations.

According to Cowie (1998), idioms are a window into shared social experiences, often reflecting collective judgments about gender, morality, and behavior. Uzbek and English phraseological units are therefore not only linguistic but also cultural artifacts.

Phraseological Units Describing Women in Uzbek

Uzbek culture, influenced by Islam and traditional Central Asian values, has long emphasized women's roles as wives, mothers, and keepers of family honor. This worldview is evident in many Uzbek idioms and proverbs.

For instance:

“Ayol uy qo'rg'oni.” (“A woman is the fortress of the home.”)

- This phrase highlights the woman's central role in maintaining domestic harmony and family unity.

“Onasiz bola — qanotsiz qush.” (“A child without a mother is like a bird without wings.”)

- The mother is depicted as the essential source of care and guidance.

“Erni er qiladigan ham xotin, qora yer qiladigan ham xotin.” (“It is a wife who makes the husband a real man, and it is also a wife who makes the husband no one.”)

-This idiom reflects the idea of power a woman has in marriage and on the husband's social role.

Such expressions generally portray women positively—as nurturing, faithful, and essential—but within a limited social framework centered on family life.

In some cases, Uzbek phraseological units also show moral judgement toward women who do not follow social expectations. For example:

“Tilini tishlamagan xotin — uyini buzadi.” (“A woman who cannot hold her tongue ruins her home.”)

-This reflects the belief that a woman should be calm, modest, and patient.

These examples illustrate the traditional expectations that define a woman’s speech, behavior, and social space in Uzbek culture.

Phraseological Units Describing Women in English

In English, phraseological units about women also reveal historical gender roles. In earlier periods, English idioms often portrayed women as emotional, beautiful, or dependent on men.

Some well-known examples include:

“A woman’s place is in the home/kitchen.”

-A traditional expression that confines women to domestic duties.

“Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.”

-This famous line, adapted from William Congreve’s 1697 play, portrays women as passionate and vengeful.

“Behind every successful man there’s a woman.”

- While positive in tone, it still defines women in relation to men’s success.

At the same time, English contains idioms that express admiration for strong or independent women, especially in modern usage:

“To wear the pants.” - A metaphor for taking control or being dominant, traditionally used about men, but now sometimes applied to women as a sign of empowerment.

“Queen bee.” - Once negative, implying a dominant or self-centered woman, but now sometimes used positively to describe leadership, especially among young women.

As society’s understanding of gender changes, the connotations of these idioms evolve. Modern English speakers often reinterpret or avoid sexist idioms, replacing them with gender-neutral or empowering language.

Comparative Linguistic Analysis

Both Uzbek and English phraseological units share similarities in how they link women to family, emotion, and morality. In both languages, older expressions emphasize women’s domestic role and obedience. For example, the Uzbek proverb “Erkak bosh, xotin bo‘yin” (“The man is the head, the woman is the neck”) resembles the English idea that a man leads the family but depends on his wife’s quiet influence—similar to “The man is the head, but the woman is the neck that turns the head.”

However, ‘the metaphorical systems’ differ. Uzbek phraseology often uses images from nature and family life—birds, fire, home, or the hearth—while English idioms use metaphors from social power or behavior—clothing (“wear the pants”), animals (“queen bee”), or roles (“lady of the house”).

Linguistically, Uzbek idioms tend to be ‘synthetic’ (expressing relations within compact forms) while English ones are ‘analytic’, often using verbs and prepositions. For instance, “Ayol uy qo‘rg‘oni” is a noun phrase, while “A woman keeps the home fires burning” is a verbal clause.

Cultural and Social Implications

The phraseological systems of both languages demonstrate how deeply gender norms are embedded in language. These idioms not only describe women but also shape expectations about their behavior.

In Uzbek, language reinforces the idea of the woman as the moral and emotional center of the home. In English, especially in older idioms, women were valued for beauty and modesty, but rarely shown as equal partners in decision-making.

However, social changes have influenced linguistic attitudes. Global movements for gender equality and education have led to a re-evaluation of such expressions. English, with its exposure to feminist discourse, has developed new idioms like “girl power” or “boss lady.” In modern Uzbek media, new expressions such as “zamonaviy ayol” (“modern woman”) reflect changing views of women’s independence and professionalism.

Discussion

The study of phraseological units provides valuable insight into how languages encode gender ideology. Both Uzbek and English demonstrate that idioms are not neutral — they transmit social hierarchies. However, language also changes with society.

When younger generations reinterpret traditional expressions or create new ones, they redefine what it means to be a woman in their culture. This dynamic relationship between language and social change makes phraseology an important area for linguistic and cultural study, especially in ELT contexts. Students learning idioms also learn about the cultural attitudes embedded in them, which promotes intercultural understanding.

Conclusion

Phraseological units are mirrors of culture. In both Uzbek and English, they reveal how societies have historically understood and valued women. Uzbek idioms often highlight the woman’s role as a mother, wife, and guardian of family unity,

while English ones reflect a broader social context that once limited but now increasingly celebrates women's independence.

While many traditional expressions still carry patriarchal ideas, both languages show signs of linguistic and cultural evolution. As societies continue to move toward gender equality, phraseological units will likely adapt to reflect new realities. Studying them allows learners not only to understand language better but also to see how culture, gender, and communication interact.

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