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# THE INTERCONTINENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

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### Abstract

Phraseological units, commonly referred to as idioms or fixed expressions, play a vital role in language. They are often seen as cultural gems that reflect the history, values, and norms of a given society. However, alongside their cultural specificity, many phraseological units exhibit intercontinental characteristics, transcending geographic and linguistic boundaries. This article explores the international nature of phraseological units, providing examples from various languages, including English, Spanish, French, and Russian, to illustrate their interconnectedness and shared meanings.

Phraseology, a subfield of linguistics, studies fixed expressions and idiomatic constructions that convey meanings beyond the literal interpretation of their components. Phraseological units (PUs), which include idioms, proverbs, collocations, and set phrases, play a significant role in language, offering insight into cultural nuances and shared human experiences. Analyzing the international features of phraseological units highlights the interconnectedness of languages and cultures, revealing how languages borrow, adapt, and evolve through contact with one another. This article aims to explore the international characteristics of phraseological units, supported by examples from various languages, illustrating their universal themes and meanings.

**Keywords:** Phraseological units, proverbs, idioms, culture, languages, phrases.

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### Introduction

Before delving into their international aspects, it's essential to define what phraseological units are. These units consist of a group of words that function as a single entity and typically convey a meaning that is not directly inferable from the individual words. Examples in English include expressions such as "kick the bucket" (to die) and "spill the beans" (to reveal a secret). Phraseological units often provide insights into cultural practices, historical contexts, and societal values.

Phraseological units can be found across languages, often highlighting similar human experiences and emotions. Their cross-linguistic presence suggests that certain ideas and experiences resonate universally, allowing phrases to emerge independently in different cultures. Here are a few examples illustrating this phenomenon:

"To kill two birds with one stone" (English) - This phrase means to achieve two goals with a single effort.

A similar expression exists in Russian: "Убить двух зайцев одним выстрелом" (to kill two hares with one shot). Both phrases emphasize efficiency in achieving multiple outcomes through a single action.

"Bite the bullet" (English) - This idiom means to face a painful or unpleasant situation with courage. A parallel can be drawn with the Spanish expression "Morder la bala" (to bite the bullet), which conveys a similar sense of enduring hardship. The idea behind both phrases suggests a human inclination to tackle difficult situations, highlighting a shared emotional response.

"Out of the frying pan and into the fire" (English) - This expression refers to moving from a bad situation to one that is worse. In French, one might say "Tomber de Charybde en Scylla", which translates to "to fall from Charybdis into Scylla," referring to the mythological sea monsters that embody danger. Both idioms signify the idea of transitioning from one perilous situation to another, showcasing the universal concept of adversity.

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Idioms: "Break the ice" (to initiate conversation in a social setting).

Proverbs: "A stitch in time saves nine" (taking decisive action can prevent bigger problems).

Collocations: "Make a decision" (certain word combinations that are commonly used together).

Many idioms draw inspiration from nature and the environment, reflecting humanity's relationship with these elements.

English: "It's raining cats and dogs" suggests extremely heavy rain, using animals to dramatize the intensity.

Spanish: "Está lloviendo a cántaros" translates to "It's raining from jars," conveying the same idea of heavy rain.

Russian: "Льет как из ведра" (It's pouring like from a bucket) also evokes a vivid image of heavy rainfall.

Food often serves as a cultural anchor, and this is reflected in phrases that revolve around gastronomy.

French: "C'est la fin des haricots" translates to "It's the end of the beans," meaning it's the end of the world or a dire situation.

Italian: "Non è un problema di spaghetti" translates directly to "It's not a spaghetti problem," used to indicate that the issue is more complex than it appears.

Animals frequently figure in phraseological units, symbolizing various human characteristics or behaviors.

English: "Curiosity killed the cat" warns against unnecessary investigation, equating curiosity with danger.

Chinese: "虎头蛇尾" (Lit: "Tiger head, snake tail") refers to something that starts strong but ends poorly, utilizing the strengths and weaknesses of animals.

As languages come into contact, they influence one another, leading to borrowed expressions.

English and Japanese: English has influenced Japanese with borrowed terms that have become fixed expressions, such as "サラリーマン" (salaryman), which

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describes a corporate worker. This term captures the Westernized working culture in Japan.

Russian and Tatar: The phrase "свой человек" (svoi chelovek - "one of us") in Russian often echoes sentiments found in Tatar expressions, highlighting the blending of cultural identities.

These linguistic borrowings not only enrich both languages but also reflect sociocultural exchanges.

### The Psychological Underpinnings of Shared Phraseological Units

The existence of similar phraseological units in different languages can be attributed to shared human experiences and psychological dispositions. The universality of certain emotions—such as love, fear, joy, and sorrow—often leads to the development of common expressions. Linguists suggest that these shared experiences create a psychological framework within which cultures develop their idiomatic expressions.

For instance, consider the phrase "thumbs up." In many cultures, this gesture and the corresponding idiomatic expression symbolize approval or agreement. Across languages, such as in Spanish, the expression "dedos arriba" conveys the same meaning. This commonality can be traced back to non-verbal communication and shared societal values surrounding affirmation and encouragement.

### Cultural Exchanges and Globalization

The increasing interconnectivity of the world through globalization has also facilitated the exchange of cultural expressions, including phraseological units. As people move across borders, they bring their language and idioms, which can influence the host language. For example, English has absorbed numerous idiomatic expressions from other languages due to historical events, trade, and cultural exchanges.

Take the example of the phrase "déjà vu." While this term is of French origin, meaning "already seen," it has been fully integrated into English vernacular to describe the strange feeling of having already experienced a situation. This

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blending of languages exemplifies the dynamics of globalization, where the movement of people and ideas fosters the interchange of language and expression.

Literature plays a critical role in popularizing phraseological units across cultures. Many idioms gain traction through their use in literature, poetry, and folklore, effectively transcending their original cultural context. The widespread translation of literary works has led to the introduction of idioms into new languages, thus expanding their reach.

For instance, Shakespeare's works have influenced idioms in English and other languages for centuries. Phrases like "the world is your oyster" have gained international recognition, and similar sentiments can be found in various forms across different cultures, emphasizing the potential for opportunity and exploration.

### Conclusion

The intercontinental characteristics of phraseological units provide a fascinating glimpse into the shared aspects of human experience and linguistic expression. While these idioms often originate from specific cultural contexts, their similar forms and meanings across different languages suggest an underlying unity in human thought and emotion.

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