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Semantic fields of urban phraseological units in English

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Annotation: *This study investigates the semantic fields of urban phraseological units (PUs) in English, focusing on their meanings, structural properties, and cultural significance within urban contexts. Urban PUs, as fixed expressions with idiomatic or metaphorical meanings, encapsulate societal values, urban lifestyles, and environmental dynamics. The research aims to classify urban PUs into semantic fields, analyze their linguistic and functional characteristics, and evaluate their role in shaping urban discourse and English language teaching (ELT). A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining corpus analysis (British National Corpus, Corpus of Contemporary American English), semi-structured interviews with native speakers, and a survey of English language learners at Uzbekistan State World Languages University. Results indicate that urban PUs cluster into semantic fields such as transportation, social interaction, urban infrastructure, economic activity, and technology, with metaphorical meanings rooted in urban experiences. The study highlights the interplay between language and urban culture, demonstrating how PUs adapt to modern urban realities. Findings suggest that urban PUs enhance communicative competence and cultural fluency in ELT. Practical recommendations include integrating urban PUs into ELT curricula and developing contextualized teaching materials to support learners' linguistic and cultural proficiency.*

Keywords: *Urban phraseological units, semantic fields, English language, urban culture, corpus analysis, communicative competence, English language teaching, metaphorical expressions, idiomatic language.*

Семантические поля урбанистических фразеологических единиц в английском языке

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Аннотация: *Данное исследование посвящено изучению семантических полей урбанистических фразеологических единиц (ФЕ) в английском языке, с акцентом на их значения, структурные свойства и культурное значение в городском контексте. Урбанистические ФЕ, как устойчивые выражения с идиоматическим или метафорическим значением, отражают общественные ценности, городские образы жизни и динамику окружающей среды. Исследование направлено на классификацию урбанистических ФЕ по семантическим полям, анализ их лингвистических и функциональных характеристик, а также оценку их роли в формировании городского дискурса и обучении английскому языку (ELT). Использовался смешанный метод, включающий корпусный анализ (Британский национальный корпус, Корпус современного американского английского), полуструктурированные интервью с носителями языка и опрос студентов, изучающих английский язык в Узбекском государственном университете мировых языков. Результаты показывают, что урбанистические ФЕ группируются в семантические поля, такие как транспорт, социальное взаимодействие, городская инфраструктура, экономическая активность и технологии, с метафорическими значениями, основанными на городском*

опыте. Исследование подчеркивает взаимосвязь между языком и городской культурой, демонстрируя, как ФЕ адаптируются к современным городским реалиям. Выводы свидетельствуют о том, что урбанистические ФЕ способствуют развитию коммуникативной компетенции и культурной грамотности в ELT. Практические рекомендации включают интеграцию урбанистических ФЕ в учебные программы ELT и разработку контекстуализированных учебных материалов для поддержки лингвистической и культурной компетенции учащихся.

Ключевые слова: Урбанистические фразеологические единицы, семантические поля, английский язык, городская культура, корпусный анализ, коммуникативная компетенция, обучение английскому языку, метафорические выражения, идиоматический язык.

Ingliz tilidagi shahar frazeologik birliklarining semantik sohalari

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Annotatsiya: Ushbu tadqiqot ingliz tilidagi shahar frazeologik birliklarining (FB) semantik sohalarni o'rganadi, ularning ma'nolari, tuzilish xususiyatlari va shahar kontekstidagi madaniy ahamiyatiga e'tibor qaratadi. Shahar FBlar, idiomatik yoki metaforik ma'noga ega barqaror iboralar sifatida, jamiyat qadriyatlarini, shahar turmush tarzini va muhit dinamikasini aks ettiradi. Tadqiqot shahar FBlarini semantik sohalarga tasniflash, ularning lingvistik va funksional xususiyatlarini tahlil qilish, shuningdek, shahar nutqi va ingliz tilini o'qitishdagi (ITO) rolini baholashni maqsad qiladi. Sifat va miqdoriy yondashuvlarni birlashtirgan metodologiya qo'llanildi, jumladan, korpus tahlili (Britaniya Milliy Korpus, Zamonaviy Amerika Ingliz Tili Korpus), ona tilida so'zlashuvchilar bilan yarim tuzilgan suhbatlar va O'zbekiston Davlat Jahon Tillari Universiteti talabalari orasida so'rovnoma. Natijalar shahar FBlarining transport, ijtimoiy munosabatlar, shahar infratuzilmasi, iqtisodiy faoliyat va texnologiya kabi semantik sohalarga guruhlanishini ko'rsatadi, bu esa shahar tajribalariga asoslangan metaforik ma'nolarni aks ettiradi. Tadqiqot til va shahar madaniyati o'rtasidagi o'zaro ta'sirni ta'kidlaydi, FBlarning zamonaviy shahar haqiqatlariga moslashishini ko'rsatadi. Natijalar shahar FBlarining ITOda kommunikativ kompetensiya va madaniy ravonlikni oshirishini tasdiqlaydi. Amaliy tavsiyalar shahar FBlarini ITO o'quv dasturlariga kiritish va talabalarning til va madaniy bilimlarini rivojlantirish uchun kontekstlashtirilgan o'quv materiallarini ishlab chiqishni o'z ichiga oladi.

Kalit so'zlar: Shahar frazeologik birliklari, semantik sohalar, ingliz tili, shahar madaniyati, korpus tahlili, kommunikativ kompetensiya, ingliz tilini o'qitish, metaforik iboralar, idiomatik til.

Introduction

The global trend of urbanization has profoundly shaped linguistic landscapes, particularly through the development of phraseological units (PUs) that reflect urban experiences. Phraseological units, defined as multi-word expressions with fixed or semi-fixed structures and idiomatic meanings (Cowie, 1998), serve as linguistic artifacts that encode societal values, cultural practices, and environmental dynamics. In English, urban PUs such as "urban jungle," "hit the road," or "keep up with the Joneses" capture the vibrancy, complexity, and challenges of city life, encompassing domains such as transportation, social interactions, infrastructure, and economic activities. As cities continue to evolve into hubs of cultural and economic activity, urban PUs play a critical role in shaping discourse and reflecting the lived experiences of urban dwellers. Despite their prevalence in everyday communication, urban PUs have received limited scholarly attention compared to other

phraseological domains, such as business idioms (Moon, 1998) or emotional metaphors (Kövecses, 2000). Existing research on PUs tends to focus on their syntactic properties or cognitive underpinnings (Gibbs, 1994), with fewer studies exploring their semantic organization within specific cultural contexts. The semantic field theory, proposed by Trier (1931), offers a framework for analyzing how words and expressions cluster around shared conceptual domains. Applying this framework to urban PUs can reveal how language organizes and represents urban experiences, providing insights into the interplay between language and culture. The research gap is particularly evident in the lack of systematic classifications of urban PUs and their applications in English language teaching (ELT). Urban PUs are not only linguistic phenomena but also cultural tools that convey urban values and lifestyles, making them relevant for language learners seeking to navigate globalized, urbanized communication contexts. This study addresses the following objectives:

1. To classify urban PUs into semantic fields based on their meanings and contextual usage.

2. To analyze the structural and functional properties of urban PUs in English discourse.

3. To evaluate the cultural significance of urban PUs and their pedagogical implications for ELT.

By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to linguistic theory by providing a semantic classification of urban PUs and to language education by offering practical recommendations for integrating these expressions into ELT curricula. The findings are expected to enhance learners' communicative competence and cultural fluency, aligning with the goals of modern language education as outlined in Uzbekistan's higher education reforms (Presidential Decree No. 5847, 2019).

Methods

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative research methods to provide a comprehensive analysis of urban phraseological units in English. The methodology is designed to capture the semantic, structural, and cultural dimensions of urban PUs, ensuring robust and replicable findings. Two large-scale corpora were utilized to identify and analyze urban PUs: the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). These corpora, containing over 100 million and 520 million words respectively, provide a representative sample of contemporary English usage. Queries were conducted using urban-related keywords (e.g., "city," "street," "traffic," "crowd," "downtown") to extract PUs. A total of 750 PUs were identified, filtered for relevance, and categorized into semantic fields. Collocation analysis was performed to examine the contextual usage of these PUs. Ten native English speakers (five from the UK, five from the US), all residents of urban areas, participated in semi-structured interviews. Participants were selected based on their linguistic background and familiarity with urban contexts. Interviews explored the meanings, usage, and cultural connotations of 20 selected urban PUs, such as "urban jungle," "hit the road," and "bright lights." Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. A questionnaire was administered to 150 English language learners (ELLs) at Uzbekistan State World Languages University (UzSWLU), comprising intermediate and advanced learners (B1–C1 levels). The survey included 25 Likert-scale questions assessing learners' familiarity with urban PUs, perceived difficulty, and interest in learning these expressions. Additionally, five open-ended questions gathered qualitative insights into learners' experiences and preferences for learning PUs. The survey was conducted online via Google Forms, ensuring accessibility and anonymity.

Qualitative Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. Transcripts were coded in NVivo to identify recurring themes related to the meanings, cultural significance, and usage of urban PUs. Themes were validated through peer debriefing with two linguists to ensure reliability.

Quantitative Analysis

Corpus data were analyzed using frequency counts, collocation analysis, and keyword-in-context (KWIC) concordance to determine the prevalence, distribution, and contextual patterns of urban PUs. Survey responses were analyzed using SPSS software, with descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, percentages) calculated for Likert-scale items and content analysis applied to open-ended responses.

Semantic Field Classification

Urban PUs were grouped into semantic fields based on Trier's (1931) semantic field theory. The classification process involved iterative coding by three independent raters, with disagreements resolved through discussion. Inter-rater reliability was assessed using Cohen's kappa, yielding a score of 0.87, indicating strong agreement.

Structural Analysis

PUs were categorized by syntactic structure (e.g., verb phrases, noun phrases, prepositional phrases) and analyzed for metaphorical versus literal meanings. A subsample of 200 PUs was subjected to detailed syntactic parsing to identify patterns in word order and composition.

Results

The corpus analysis identified five primary semantic fields for urban PUs, reflecting the multifaceted nature of urban experiences:

1. Transportation and Mobility (32% of PUs): This field includes expressions related to movement and navigation in urban environments, such as "hit the road" (to depart), "in the fast lane" (living a fast-paced life), "off the beaten track" (unconventional), and "on the wrong side of the tracks" (from a disadvantaged area). These PUs often use transportation metaphors to convey broader concepts of progress, change, or social status.

2. Social Interaction (28% of PUs): PUs in this field capture the dynamics of urban social networks, including "rub shoulders with" (to interact closely), "keep up with the Joneses" (to compete socially), "talk of the town" (a popular topic), and "paint the town red" (to celebrate extravagantly). These expressions reflect the density, diversity, and competitiveness of urban social life.

3. Urban Infrastructure (20% of PUs): This field encompasses PUs related to physical urban environments, such as "urban jungle" (a chaotic city), "concrete jungle" (a city dominated by buildings), "bright lights" (the allure of city life), and "down the drain" (wasted effort, often linked to urban resource challenges). These PUs evoke sensory and emotional responses to urban landscapes.

4. Economic Activity (15% of PUs): PUs in this field relate to commerce, work, and financial transactions, such as "make a quick buck" (to earn money quickly), "cut corners" (to save time or money), "wheel and deal" (to negotiate business), and "cash cow" (a profitable venture). These expressions highlight the economic vibrancy and opportunism of urban settings.

5. Technology and Innovation (5% of PUs): An emerging field, this includes PUs linked to urban technological advancements, such as "plugged into the grid" (connected to systems), "off the radar" (unnoticed), and "digital divide" (technological inequality). These PUs reflect the growing influence of technology in urban life.

Syntactic analysis revealed that 55% of urban PUs are verb phrases (e.g., "hit the road," "rub shoulders with"), 30% are noun phrases (e.g., "urban jungle," "bright lights"), and 15% are prepositional phrases (e.g., "in the fast lane," "off the beaten track"). Metaphorical meanings dominate, with 85% of PUs exhibiting figurative extensions derived from literal urban contexts. For example, "urban jungle" metaphorically conveys chaos, while its literal roots lie in the physical density of cities. Interviews with native speakers highlighted the cultural richness of urban PUs. Participants described these expressions as vivid, humorous, and emotionally resonant, often evoking nostalgia, critique, or aspiration. For instance, "bright lights" was associated with the excitement and opportunities of city life, while "urban jungle" was seen as a humorous yet critical depiction of urban chaos. Participants also noted that PUs vary by region, with American speakers favoring expressions like "downtown" (central business district) and British speakers using "high street" (main shopping area).

Survey results indicated that ELLs found urban PUs challenging due to their idiomatic nature (mean difficulty score: 3.9/5, SD = 0.8). Specific challenges included understanding metaphorical meanings (e.g., "keep up with the Joneses") and recognizing contextual usage. However, learners expressed strong interest in learning urban PUs (mean interest score: 4.3/5, SD = 0.7), citing their relevance to modern communication and cultural understanding. Open-ended responses emphasized the need for contextualized examples, multimedia resources, and real-world applications in ELT. Approximately 70% of respondents agreed that urban PUs would enhance their communicative competence, particularly in professional and social settings. Collocation analysis revealed that urban PUs frequently co-occur with adjectives and adverbs that amplify their emotional or evaluative tone. For example, "urban jungle" often appears with "chaotic" or "overwhelming," while "bright lights" collocates with "dazzling" or "alluring." Frequency analysis showed that transportation and social interaction PUs are more common in spoken discourse (e.g., interviews, media), while infrastructure and economic PUs dominate written texts (e.g., news articles, academic writing).

Discussion

The classification of urban PUs into five semantic fields – transportation, social interaction, urban infrastructure, economic activity, and technology – provides a robust framework for understanding their semantic organization and cultural significance. The prominence of transportation and social interaction fields (60% of PUs combined) reflects the centrality of mobility and interpersonal dynamics in urban life. These findings align with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, which posits that metaphors are grounded in physical and cultural experiences. For instance, the metaphorical extension of "hit the road" from literal travel to departure illustrates how urban mobility shapes linguistic creativity. Similarly, "keep up with the Joneses" draws on the competitive social dynamics of urban communities, highlighting the cultural value of status and comparison. The emergence of a technology-related semantic field, though smaller (5%), signals the evolving nature of urban PUs in response to digitalization and innovation. Expressions like "digital divide" and "plugged into the grid" reflect the integration of technology into urban life, a trend likely to grow as cities become "smart" and interconnected. This finding suggests that urban PUs are not static but adapt to sociocultural and technological shifts, supporting Burger's (2010) argument that phraseology is a dynamic linguistic phenomenon.

Structurally, the dominance of verb phrases (55%) may be attributed to their action-oriented nature, which suits the dynamic, fast-paced context of urban life. Noun phrases like "urban jungle" and "bright lights" serve as vivid descriptors, evoking sensory imagery that resonates with urban dwellers. The high prevalence of metaphorical meanings (85%) underscores the cognitive role of PUs in conceptualizing complex urban realities, as argued by Kövecses (2000). These metaphors act as cognitive shortcuts, enabling speakers to convey nuanced ideas efficiently. From a pedagogical perspective, the survey results highlight both challenges and opportunities in teaching urban PUs. Their idiomatic nature poses difficulties for ELLs, particularly in decoding metaphorical meanings and contextual usage. However, their cultural relevance and communicative utility make them engaging for learners. Integrating urban PUs into ELT curricula, as recommended, can bridge linguistic and cultural knowledge, aligning with Nattinger and DeCarrico's (1992) advocacy for teaching lexical phrases to enhance fluency. For example, teaching "paint the town red" in the context of urban nightlife can spark discussions on cultural practices, deepening learners' cultural competence. The cultural significance of urban PUs, as revealed through interviews, underscores their role as linguistic mirrors of urban values. The regional variations noted by participants (e.g., "downtown" in American English vs. "high street" in British English) suggest that urban PUs are sensitive to local contexts, a finding that warrants further exploration in globalized urban settings. For instance, how do urban PUs function in non-native English-speaking megacities like Tokyo or Lagos? This question opens avenues for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research. The study also raises methodological considerations. While the corpus analysis provided a broad overview of urban PUs, the inclusion of social media data (e.g., Twitter, Reddit) could capture emerging expressions in

digital urban discourse. Similarly, the survey sample was limited to Uzbekistani learners, and future studies could include learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds to assess the global applicability of the findings. The relatively low representation of technology-related PUs (5%) suggests a potential gap in capturing the full spectrum of modern urban life, particularly in tech-driven cities.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the semantic fields of urban phraseological units in English, classifying them into transportation, social interaction, urban infrastructure, economic activity, and technology domains. The findings highlight the dynamic interplay between language and urban culture, with PUs serving as linguistic tools for encoding urban experiences and values. Structurally, urban PUs are predominantly verb phrases with metaphorical meanings, reflecting the action-oriented and figurative nature of urban discourse. The pedagogical implications are significant, as urban PUs offer a valuable resource for enhancing communicative competence and cultural fluency in ELT. By integrating these expressions into curricula and developing contextualized teaching materials, educators can address learners' challenges with idiomatic language and foster deeper cultural understanding. The survey results underscore learners' interest in urban PUs, suggesting that their inclusion in ELT can make language learning more engaging and relevant. Future research should explore the evolution of urban PUs in globalized urban contexts, particularly in non-native English-speaking regions. Expanding the corpus analysis to include social media and digital platforms could uncover emerging PUs reflective of contemporary urban life. Additionally, cross-cultural studies could examine how urban PUs are adapted or reinterpreted in multilingual urban settings, contributing to a global perspective on phraseology. This study lays the foundation for further investigations into the intersection of language, culture, and urbanization. By illuminating the semantic and cultural dimensions of urban PUs, it contributes to linguistic scholarship and offers practical insights for language education, aligning with the goals of fostering linguistic and cultural proficiency in a rapidly urbanizing world.

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