

The Representation of Perception in Phraseological Units

Datu Abdula Martinez Uka III

Research Scholar, Department of Foreign Languages, South Ural State University,
Chelyabinsk, Russia, ukadats@gmail.com

Abstract

People share knowledge through perception and express it using language. As modern cultural linguistic studies have not extensively explored sensory linguistics, specifically sensory language in phraseology, this research aims to give a part of the perceptual code of English culture through continuous sampling, semantic analysis, and elements of statistical methods of phraseological units (PhUs) from seven explanatory English dictionaries. 796 sensory phraseological units were gained and classified into six distinct groups according to the components they contain: perceptual process, sensory organ, perceptual sensation, subjectivity, quality, and perceptual ability. Such classification is based on each mode's components, similar to the other modes. It is shown that, of all the sensory modes, tactile perception is the most presentable and is most frequently expressed verbally in language, and olfaction is the least expressed. Semantic analysis distinguishes the direct and indirect meanings of sensory PhUs, in which metaphorical changes often strip these units of their perceptive components. The results proved that through phraseology, unpleasant sensory experiences are dominantly expressed in English to understand how sensory modes are verbalized in language, thus shedding light on the fundamental ways in which we construct our understanding of reality and highlighting the critical role of sensory processing in human cognition.

Keywords: perception, phraseology, phraseological units, semantics, English language

Introduction

Humans experience the world that is shaped by sense perceptions, which serve as the primary means of interaction with their surroundings. Our senses (sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch) provide us with vital information and allow us to navigate, understand, and respond to the world around us. This sensory input forms the basis of our reality, influencing not only our immediate experiences but also our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Moreover, there are significant cultural differences in how we experience the world primarily through our senses, and these are reflected in our language (Majid et al., 2018). This is explained by the fact that linguistic consciousness is formed under the influence of specific norms, traditions, attitudes, and behavior models accepted in different cultures (Balandina and Peredrienko 2019, p. 4). What seems pleasant to one may be perceived non-identically by others while employing some collective terms when expressing thoughts or ideas in a certain situation.

A special cultural space is called a cultural code. The structure of the cultural code is complex, and Maslova and Pimenova (2018) defined it as a "set of values, as well as a system of normative and evaluative criteria through which people comprehend the world." They noted that a person's relationship to the culture in which he lives is reflected in some of the contents that are literal

and expressed explicitly, and in some that have a deep meaning. The perceptual code of culture is thus a set of norms and values about the perception system. Cultural code, as Moiseenko (2022) mentioned, is better traced in phraseological units as they “accumulate not only the culture of the past and present of the people who speak a certain language but also the very spirit of these people.”

Aim, Methods, and Materials

This study aims to describe a part of the perceptual code in phraseological units (PhUs) of English linguo-culture. Through continuous sampling methods, semantic analysis, and statistical analysis, the tasks below are set to achieve the aim:

- to select the PhUs containing the semes of sensory perception;
- to classify the chosen PhUs according to the sensory perception modes; and
- to define the connotation of PhUs containing the sensory perception semes.

Research materials were obtained by extracting the PhUs from the following seven English dictionaries: Cambridge Dictionary, Collins Dictionary, Longman Dictionary, Macmillan Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Oxford Dictionary, and The Free Dictionary. The study identified keywords containing the lexical seme of sensory perception in selecting the phraseological units: words nominating the perceptual process, sensory organ, perceptual sensation, subjectivity, quality, and perceptual ability/inability. Using these keywords is essential to collect all the terms and associations related to sensory perception that form the basis of phraseological units.

Results and Analyses

796 PhUs of sensory modalities were gained and classified according to the six components they contain. Each mode has a common and similar available component to the other modes, and this paved the way for the combined grouping and classification of PhUs for all sensory modes.

Table 1. Classification and Total Count of Sensory Phraseological Units

Lexical Components	No. Sensory PhUs
PhUs with the component “sensory organ” <i>all sensory modes</i>	223 units
PhUs with the component “perceptual process” <i>all sensory modes</i>	215 units
PhUs with the component “quality of perception” <i>auditory, gustatory, and tactile modes</i>	174 units
PhUs with the component “perceptual sensation” <i>olfactory, auditory, and gustatory modes</i>	137 units
PhUs with the component “ability/inability to perception” <i>visual and auditory modes</i>	44 units
PhUs with the component “subject of perception” <i>visual mode</i>	3 units

It is shown that through semantic analysis, the most presentable and numerous in all modes are the PhUs having the component of “sensory organ” formed by the PhUs with the elements of nouns (*eye/s, nose, ear/s, tongue, mouth, skin, finger/s, and hand/s*) and dominated by the units with a negative connotation. The results imply that sensory organs frequently produce an unpleasant effect that is more powerful and immediate. The PhU *shutting one's ears to something*, for example, conveys a “conscious ignorance or unwillingness to listen”, which reflects an impactful judgment about the behavior. Furthermore, because PhUs commonly convey moral or ethical judgments, sensory organs are symbolically employed to highlight undesirable characteristics or behaviors such as the units *keep one's nose up at something* that verbalizes the meaning of “arrogance”; *under one's nose* and *go in one ear and out the other* that represents the meaning of “failure to notice/forgetfulness”; *down in the mouth* and *(a) slip of the tongue* that portrays the meaning of “disappointment”; *to turn one's nose up at something* that expresses the meaning of “dislike”; as well as *point a/the finger at* and *the finger of blame/suspicion* that gives the meaning of “blame/suspicion”. Additionally, the organs frequently represent deeper psychological and emotional breakdowns or outbursts as seen in the units denoting “sadness” (e.g. *keep one's nose*); “crying” (e.g. *cry one's eyes out* and *pipe one's eye*); “anxiety” (e.g. *make someone's skin crawl/creep* and *jump out of one's skin*); and “anger/irritation” (e.g. *wring one's hands, (get) under the/one's skin, and thin skin*). These organs are involved in negative phraseological units that can express intricate concepts regarding social relationships and human behavior.

The “perceptual process” is the second most presentable component formed by the PhUs with the elements of verbs (*see, look, hear, listen, smell, taste, touch, etc.*) and dominated by the positively connotated units. The process in vision, olfaction, audition, and tactility is positively verbalized except for gustation, which is mostly negative. In verbalizing the group's positivity, connotative features of “attentiveness” (e.g. *watch like a hawk* and *listen (out) for*); “discovery/realization of the truth” (e.g. *see life, see the light, wake up and smell the coffee/roses, etc.*); “pleasure/enjoyment” (e.g. *smell divine, smell the roses, season to taste, lick one's lips, lick something into shape, etc.*), “nobility” (e.g. *listen to (one's) better angels*); “protection/safety” (e.g. *not touch a hair of somebody's head* and *touch on wood*) and “sympathy” (e.g. *touch a chord in/with*) are identified in this process. The results of this group show that perceptual process units offer reassurance and comfort to assist people in managing difficulties by emphasizing positive interpretations of their experiences. Positively connotated units predominate in the perceptual process to convey messages in a way that is more encouraging and unlikely to cause discomfort.

The “quality” components, being the third most dominant group, are mostly identified in auditory, taste, and touch modes. The verbalization patterns of PhUs related to sensory qualities that are adjectives in form (*loud, quiet, salty, sweet, bitter, sour, hot, cold, smooth, rough, etc.*) are influenced by the intrinsic nature of sensory experiences, cultural values, and the typical contexts in which these senses are engaged. The qualities of auditory units tend to be mostly neutral due to the everyday and context-dependent nature of sounds, as seen in the units *say (something) out loud, so quiet you could hear a pin drop, (as) quiet as a grave, and quiet reflection*. Quality-based gustatory units are mostly positive, reflecting the inherent

metaphorical “pleasure, adoration, interest, or desire” (e.g. *little fish are sweet, the sweet science, juicy detail*, etc.) and the importance of “comfortable experience” (e.g. *home sweet home* and *soft fire makes sweet malt*). Tactile quality phraseologies are negative due to the prominence of physical or emotional “pain” (e.g. *give somebody the cold shoulder; in cold blood, take a heavy toll, rough and tumble*, etc.) and “discomfort” (e.g. *have/give (somebody) a rough ride, feel like death warmed over, chilled/frozen to the marrow, frozen stiff*, etc.) in touch perception and their vividness in language.

Comprising relevant other words relating to sensory experiences (*odor, scent, stink, echo, sound, whisper, flavor, savor*, etc.), the component of "perceptual sensation" is identified in olfactory, auditory, and gustatory perceptions. It is mostly verbalized negatively in olfaction and audition, while gustation is mostly verbalized neutrally. This suggests that unpleasant experiences are more likely to capture attention than positive experiences, and that strong unpleasant reactions are what make unpleasant experiences memorable. Examples of such expressions are *sound and fury*, denoting the meaning of “uselessness”, and *stink to high heaven*, denoting the meaning of “unpleasant mark”.

The "ability/inability" to perceive sensory information is mostly expressed negatively in PhUs of the vision that creates the core semes of “blindness” and of the audition, which gives a two-fold meaning of “deafness” (a receptive disability) and “muteness” (a productive disability). Phraseological units related to olfaction, gustation, and tactility are rather rare or non-existent. PhUs such as *turn a blind eye*, *(as) mute as a fish*, and *deaf and dumb* are examples of this perceptual inability, which can be temporary or permanent.

Being the least numbered group, the “subjectivity” of PhUs is only presented in vision with its elements of *observer* (e.g. *royal observer*) and *watcher* (e.g. *poll watcher*). All constituents of this group embody the neutral meaning because they characterize the perceiving individual. Although there exist individual words in English (*smeller, hearer, taster, toucher, and feeler*) to name the subject, the phraseological components of olfaction, audition, gustation, and tactility were not established to verbalize the doer of an action.

In addition to direct meanings, semantic analysis helps us determine the connotation of PhUs, including the semes of sensory perception by pointing to metaphorical sources. Certain phraseological units, such as the VPhU *see the light*, the OPhU *ring a bell*, the APhU *throwing perfume into ash*, the GPhU *bitter/hard pill to swallow*, and the TPhU *a rough diamond/diamond in the rough*, might lose their perceptual component after undergoing certain metaphorical changes. Metaphors give language expressiveness and emotional impact, but they can also represent attitudes and feelings that are difficult to express. As humans, metaphorical thinking plays a major role in comprehending abstract ideas. We make sense of these abstract ideas into familiar, concrete experiences.

Statistical analysis showed that gustation and vision are verbalized positively in language, whereas olfaction, audition, and tactility are mostly expressed negatively. With over 260 (33%), tactile perception has the greatest number of phraseological units, followed by hearing with 204 PhUs (26%), vision with 146 PhUs (18%), and taste mode with 140 units (17%). Olfaction has the fewest phraseological perceptual group, with only 46 units (6%). The percentage

distribution of the PhUs for each perceptual mode was estimated using the positive, neutral, and negatively coded units. The figure below shows the connotation of the PhUs:

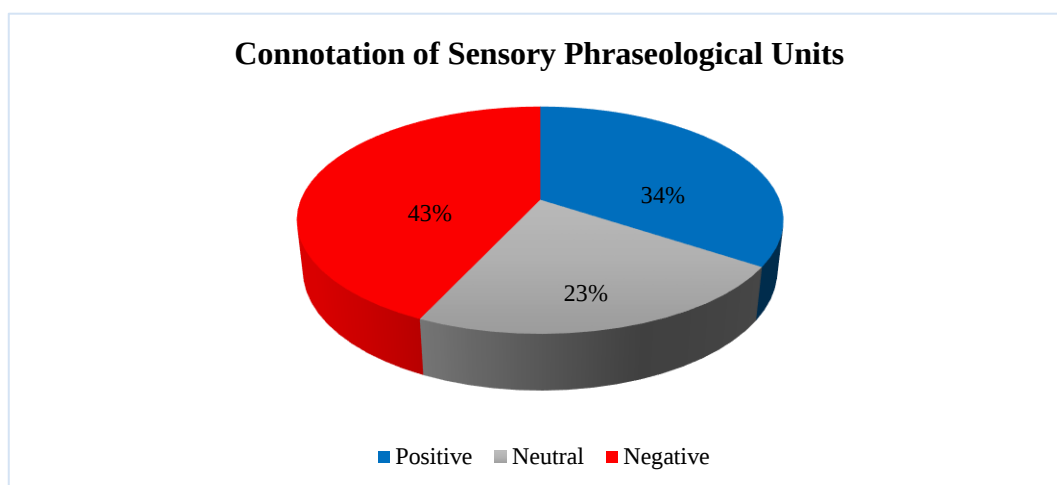


Figure 1. Connotation of Sensory Phraseological Units

The data received showed that negative verbalization is more common in the English language, with 343 PhUs (43%), followed by units with positive connotations which gained 273 PhUs (34%), and neutrally colored units, which are the least numbered group having a total of 180 PhUs (23%). Vision and gustation are primarily positively verbalized, whereas the olfactory, auditory, and haptic modes are primarily negatively expressed.

Conclusion

Phraseological units (PhUs) are a valuable linguistic lens through which the perceptual worldview of English speakers is reflected. Classifying sensory PhUs across various lexical components provides us with an in-depth understanding of how perception is verbalized and culturally encoded in the English language. The results and findings led us to discover that negative sensory experiences are primarily encoded and communicated in English to reflect the difficulties that individuals regularly face.

This study affirms that perception is not merely a biological function but rather a deeply embedded cultural and cognitive framework, reflected and perpetuated through language such as English, and this adheres to Maslova and Pimenova's code of culture. As repositories of cultural memory and evaluative attitudes, PhUs offer insight into how societies categorize and communicate sensory experience. The findings contribute to the broader understanding of the perceptual code in linguo-cultural studies, but as this study focuses on the English language, future research could explore other languages to examine how perceptual experiences are semantically represented, particularly those with unpleasant linguo-cognitive features.

References

1. Balandina, E. S., Peredrienko, T. Yu. (2019). The model of psycholinguistic image analysis. *XLinguae*, 12 (2), 3-16.
2. Majid, A., Roberts, S. G., Cilissen, L., Emmorey, K., Nicodemus, B., O'grady, L., Woll, B., LeLan, B., de Sousa, H., Cansler, B. L., Shayan, S., de Vos, C., Senft, G., Enfield, N. J., Razak, R., Fedden,

- S., Tufvesson, S., Dingemanse, M., Ozturk, O., Brown, P., Hill, C., Le Guen, O., Hirtzel, V., van Gijn, R., Sicoli, M. A., Levinson, S. C. (2018). Differential coding of perception in the world's languages. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, 45, 11369–11376.
<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1720419115>
3. Maslova, V. A., Pimenova, M. V. (2018). *Linguistic Codes*. Moscow: Flinta, 180.
 4. Moiseenko, D.A. (2022). Perceptual code of linguistic culture in the texts of German media, Military-humanitarian almanac. *Materials of the XVI International Scientific Conference on Current Problems of Language and Communication*. Moscow, 410-418.