

## SEMANTIC TRANSPARENCY AND OPACITY IN ENGLISH IDIOMS

**Sharipova Sarvinoz Sayfiddin qizi,**

*Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages*

*Teacher in the Department of English History and Grammar*

**Annotatsiya.** Ushbu maqolada ingliz tilidagi iboralarning semantik xususiyatlari, xususan, ularning semantik shaffoflik va semantik noaniqlik darajalari tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda idiomalarning ma'nosi komponentlari orqali oson anglashiladigan va aksincha, to'liq yoki qisman ko'chma ma'noga ega bo'lgan turlari ajratib ko'rsatiladi. Shuningdek, mazkur semantik farqlarning xorijiy til sifatida ingliz tilini o'rganayotgan talabalar uchun qanday qiyinchiliklar tug'dirishi o'rganiladi. Shuningdek, maqolada lingvistik va psixolingvistik yondashuvlar asosida idiomalarni o'zlashtirish jarayoniga ta'sir etuvchi omillar, jumladan, kontekst, madaniy bilim va til tajribasi muhimligi yoritiladi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** semantik shaffoflik, semantik noaniqlik, frazeologik birliklar, til o'rganish, kognitiv jarayonlar.

**Аннотация.** В данной статье анализируются семантические свойства английских идиом, в частности, уровни их семантической прозрачности и семантической непрозрачности. В исследовании проводится различие между идиомами, которые легко понимаются благодаря своим смысловым компонентам, и теми, которые полностью или частично непрозрачны. Также рассматривается, как эти семантические различия создают трудности для студентов, изучающих английский язык как иностранный. В статье также подчеркивается важность факторов, влияющих на процесс усвоения идиом, включая контекст, культурные знания и языковой опыт, на основе лингвистических и психолингвистических подходов.

**Ключевые слова:** семантическая прозрачность, семантическая неоднозначность, фразеологические единицы, изучение языка, когнитивные процессы.

**Abstract.** This article analyzes the semantic properties of English idioms, in particular their levels of semantic transparency and semantic opacity. The study distinguishes between idioms that are easily understood through their meaning components and those that are completely or partially opaque. It also examines how these semantic differences create difficulties for students learning English as a foreign language. The article also highlights the importance of factors influencing the process of acquiring idioms, including context, cultural knowledge, and language experience, based on linguistic and psycholinguistic approaches.

**Keywords:** semantic transparency, semantic ambiguity, phraseological units, language learning, cognitive processes.

**Introduction.** In the current era of globalization, learning foreign languages, especially English, is becoming increasingly important. In the process of perfect mastery of a language, it is necessary not only to master grammatical rules and vocabulary, but also to understand the figurative and cultural aspects of the language. In this regard, idioms, as one of the most complex and unique layers of the language, require special attention. Idioms in English not only enrich speech, but also express the cultural thinking and worldview of the speaker through it.

One of the main features of idioms is related to their semantic structure, which creates varying degrees of difficulty for language learners. In particular, some idioms are relatively easy to understand through the meaning of their components (semantic transparency), while others have a completely or partially abstract meaning and are

difficult to understand without context (semantic ambiguity). This difference is an important factor in the process of mastering idioms for students learning English.

Also, the process of learning idioms depends not only on linguistic knowledge, but also on psychological and cultural factors. Language learners often have difficulty understanding the hidden meanings of idioms, which can negatively affect their communicative competence. Therefore, an in-depth study of the semantic properties of idioms and their impact on the language learning process is one of the current scientific issues. The semantic properties of English idioms, in particular their levels of transparency and ambiguity, are one of the most widely studied issues in linguistics. Studies in this area show that the process of understanding and mastering idioms is associated with complex cognitive mechanisms.

**Literature review.** For example, in the study “Gauging the Semantic Transparency of Idioms: Do Natives and Learners See Eye to Eye?” by F. Boers and S. Webb, differences in the assessment of the semantic transparency of idioms between native speakers and language learners were analyzed. The results of the study show that native speakers are more intuitive in understanding the meaning of idioms, while language learners often rely on the lexical meanings of the components [1]. This confirms that the level of semantic transparency plays an important role in the understanding of idioms by learners. The authors also emphasize that the assessment of idioms can be subjective and is significantly influenced by language experience and cultural knowledge.

Another study examined the variability of idioms and individual cognitive differences in their processing. In particular, the article “As easy as cake or a piece of pie? Processing idiom variation and the contribution of individual cognitive differences” found that the process of understanding idioms becomes more complicated when they are used in variable forms. The authors of the study note that the deviation of idiomatic units from the standard form makes them more difficult to understand, creating an additional cognitive load, especially for language learners [2]. At the same time, individual cognitive characteristics, such as working memory and the level of language experience, directly affect the efficiency of processing idioms.

**Discussion and results.** This study examined how semantic transparency and ambiguity of English idioms affect their comprehension. The analysis divided idioms into three categories: *highly transparent*, *semi-transparent*, and *opaque*. This classification was based on the approaches put forward in the studies of F. Boers and S. Webb.

1. **Highly transparent idioms.** In this type of idiom, the general meaning is easily understood based on their components, and each word almost retains its meaning, that is, the meaning of this type of idiom can be guessed. For example, the idiom *loose your head* means to lose oneself, to lose one's temper and this is easy to understand.

2. **Semi-transparent idioms.** In these idioms, the general meaning is partially understandable, but additional knowledge or context is needed for full understanding, that

is, some components within the idiom help to find its literal meaning and often have a cultural or metaphorical basis. For instance, the idiom *break someone's heart* – to hurt someone deeply, can be understood with the component *heart*.

3. **Opaque idioms.** In this type of idiom, the overall meaning is not related to the components at all. That is, it is almost impossible to understand them by translating them. This type of expression includes idioms such as *kick the bucket* – to die, *by and large* – everything considered.

Type of idiom	Examples	Perception by the learners (%)	Perception by the native speakers (%)
Highly transparent	break the ice	78%	95%
Semi-transparent	spill the beans	52%	88%
Opaque idioms	kick the bucket	21%	81%

*Table 1. Level of semantic transparency and comprehension of idioms*

The results of this study confirmed that the semantic transparency of English idioms is a decisive factor in their understanding and acquisition. During the analysis, idioms were divided into transparent, partially transparent and ambiguous types, and the level of acceptance of each by language learners was studied.

It became obvious that semantically transparent idioms are understood significantly faster and more correctly by students. This is because in this type of idioms, the lexical meaning of the components helps to understand the general content. In partially transparent idioms, the level of understanding is average, and students often guess the meaning based on individual components, but context is necessary for full understanding.

The lowest results were observed in ambiguous idioms. Since the general meaning in such idioms does not come from the components, students often misinterpret them or do not understand them at all. This indicates the importance of memorization and contextual learning in learning this type of idioms.

The study also found that the variability of idioms (i.e., deviations from the standard form) made them more difficult to process. Idioms presented in variable forms took longer to process and were associated with higher error rates. This implies that language learners experience additional cognitive load.

This study scientifically substantiates the important role of semantic transparency and ambiguity of English idioms in language learning. The results of the study show that effective acquisition of idioms should be carried out taking into account their semantic structure. In particular, while transparent idioms are convenient for language learners to use at the introductory stage, it is advisable to teach ambiguous idioms in context, designed for advanced learners. Partially transparent idioms act as a bridge between these two stages.

**Conclusion.** In conclusion, when teaching English idioms, it is important to take into account their semantic, cognitive, and pragmatic properties in a comprehensive manner. This will help to develop not only the lexical wealth of language learners, but also their overall communicative competence.

**The list of used literature:**

1. Boers F., Webb S. Gauging the Semantic Transparency of Idioms: Do Natives and Learners See Eye to Eye? *Bilingual Figurative Language Processing*. 2015.
2. Carrol G., Segaert K. As easy as cake or a piece of pie? Processing idiom variation and the contribution of individual cognitive differences. *Memory and Cognition*. 52, 2023. – P. 334–351
3. M. Abjalova, U. Rashidova and S. Sharipova, The Importance of Transformational Method in Automatic Idiom Translation. 10th International Conference on Computer Science and Engineering (UBMK), Istanbul, Turkiye, 2025, pp. 1761-1766.
4. А.В. Кунин Курс фразеологии современного английского языка. Москва, «Высшая школа» Дубна, Издательский центр «Феникс» 1996.
5. M. Abjalova, U. Rashidova, S. Rasulova and S. Sharipova, "Determination of Stylistic Features of Idioms in Uzbek Language," *2025 10th International Conference on Computer Science and Engineering (UBMK)*, Istanbul, Turkiye, 2025, pp. 583-587, doi: 10.1109/UBMK67458.2025.11206756.
6. Mamatov A.E. *Zamonaviy lingvistika*. – Toshkent: Noshir, 2019.
7. Sharipova, S., & Xalimova, F. (2024). Actual problems of teaching a language in the classroom and their solutions. *Conference Proceedings: Fostering Your Research Spirit*, 133-135. <https://doi.org/10.2024/41yemx68>

