

**GRADUAL SEMANTICS OF PHRASEOLOGISMS IN THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE**

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13994954>

Abstract. Many linguists have conducted studies on phraseologisms to date. However, the gradual semantics of phraseological units has not been thoroughly examined yet. Therefore, the author of this paper intends to explore the factors that affect the gradual semantics of phraseological units and provide relevant examples to illustrate them.

Key words: gradual semantics, phraseologisms, context, formality, emotional intensity, cultural variation.

INTRODUCTION

Phraseologisms are fixed expressions, idioms, or set phrases in a language whose meaning cannot always be deduced from the individual meanings of their components [3].

The Concept of Gradual Semantics: Gradual semantics refers to the subtle shifts or degrees of meaning that can occur in phraseological units depending on factors such as context, formality, emotional intensity, and cultural variation [7].

The aim of this thesis is to explore how gradual semantics affects the meaning of phraseologisms in various contexts and how these shifts contribute to the understanding of phraseological expressions in different languages.

ANALYSIS AND THE RESULTS

Gradual semantics of phraseologisms refers to the subtle shifts or degrees of meaning that can occur within fixed expressions or idioms, depending on their usage, context, and component elements. Phraseologisms, or fixed expressions, often have meanings that extend beyond the literal combination of their words. However, their semantic range can vary or "gradually" shift in intensity, formality, or connotation based on several factors. Here's a breakdown of gradual semantics in phraseologisms:

1. Contextual Variation. The meaning of a phraseologism can change subtly based on the context in which it is used. For example, the phrase "break the ice" typically means to initiate a conversation in a tense or formal situation. However, the exact degree of awkwardness or tension that is implied can vary depending on the context, ranging from a minor social discomfort to a significant interpersonal barrier.



- Example: "Break the ice" may vary in meaning based on the formal or informal nature of the situation [3].

2. Synonymic Variability. Within a language, there are often several phraseological units that express similar ideas but differ in their intensity or emotional load. For instance, in English, "shed tears" and "cry one's eyes out" both refer to crying, but the second phrase suggests a much more intense emotional state. These expressions show gradual differences in meaning.

- Example: "Shed tears" versus "cry one's eyes out" [4]."

3. Stylistic Nuances. Phraseologisms often carry stylistic or register-based nuances. Some may be more formal, while others are colloquial or informal. This contributes to the gradual semantics by allowing the same phraseological idea to be expressed with varying degrees of seriousness, humor, or politeness. For example, "kick the bucket" (informal) and "pass away" (formal) both mean "to die," but the semantic impact is different due to their stylistic qualities.

- Example: "Kick the bucket" vs. "pass away" as an illustration of register-based shifts in meaning [8].

4. Componential Semantics. The individual words within a phraseologism can also affect its overall meaning through gradual semantics. Although phraseologisms are generally non-compositional (i.e., their meaning cannot be deduced from individual words), certain components can still influence subtle shifts in meaning. For example, in the phrase "hold one's tongue" (meaning to stay silent), the verb "hold" suggests a conscious effort, implying more restraint than simply "keeping quiet."

5. Connotation and Emotional Gradation. Many phraseologisms carry emotional or connotative meanings that can change in intensity. For example, "be over the moon" expresses extreme happiness, while "be on cloud nine" also refers to happiness but might imply a slightly less intense emotional state. This shift demonstrates the gradual nature of semantics in phraseologisms.

- Example: "Over the moon" vs. "on cloud nine" [6]."

6. Cultural and Social Factors. The gradual semantics of phraseologisms can also be influenced by cultural or societal changes. As certain expressions gain or lose favor in language, their meaning or emotional impact may gradually shift. Over time, an expression that once had a positive or neutral connotation might take on a negative tone or vice versa.

- Example: The meaning of a phrase like "strike while the iron is hot" in different cultural contexts [9].

SUMMARY





In summary, gradual semantics in phraseologisms reflects the fluidity of meaning in fixed expressions, which can be influenced by factors such as context, synonymic variation, stylistic usage, componential meaning, and cultural evolution. These gradual shifts allow phraseologisms to adapt to different communicative needs while retaining their core idiomatic meaning.

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