

EXPLORING THE MEANING OF NATURE-BASED PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS: A SEMANTIC APPROACH

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Abstract: *This article explores the world of phraseological units, with a special focus on expressions related to nature and the natural environment. Phraseological units are meaningful combinations of words that capture natural imagery, landscapes, and environmental phenomena in a compact and expressive form. The study examines their meanings, origins, and usage in everyday English, highlighting expressions such as “under the weather”, “a breath of fresh air”, “break the ice” and “a drop in the ocean”. Understanding these expressions improves linguistic competence and deepens appreciation of the English language’s vivid connection to nature and the physical world.*

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Phraseology in linguistics refers to the study of fixed or semi-fixed expressions, including idioms, phrasal verbs, and other multi-word lexical units, often known as phrasemes. These expressions carry meanings that are more specialized or cannot be fully understood by simply combining the meanings of their individual components. The term “phraseology” originates from the Greek words *phrasis* meaning “way of speaking” and *-logia* meaning “study of.” As a scholarly discipline, phraseology began to develop in the twentieth century. Its foundations were laid by the work of Charles Bally, whose concept of locutions *phraseologiques* influenced Russian lexicology and lexicography during the 1930s and 1940s. The field was later further developed in the former Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries. From the late 1960s, phraseology became established in East German linguistics and was gradually explored, though less extensively, within English linguistics as well.[11]. A.V. Koonin categorized phraseological units based on their formation process. He distinguished between primary and secondary methods of forming phraseological units [3].

Nature-based phraseological units represent a significant part of the English lexicon, as they draw on elements of the natural world to express abstract ideas and everyday experiences. These expressions often rely on imagery related to weather, animals, water, or landscapes, making language more vivid and memorable.

As D.T. Khadjieva, English proverbs and sayings form an essential part of the language, reflecting the cultural and historical backgrounds in which they originated. These brief and expressive statements have been transmitted from generation to generation, conveying wisdom, moral lessons, and universal truths. Their origins often mirror the values, beliefs, and life experiences of the people who created them, and they remain relevant in contemporary communication [1]. Phraseological units that include names of animals and plants form one of

the largest and most diverse groups within the phraseological system. These expressions are based on long-standing human observations of the physical characteristics, habits, and behavior of animals and plants. They also reflect people's attitudes toward the natural world, particularly toward animals, often referred to as their "smaller brothers." As a result, such phraseological units serve as an important cultural and informational resource in every language.[2]

Certainly, These types of expressions undoubtedly play a significant role in phraseology. In the course of this research, a wide range of phraseological units in the English language have been analyzed.

Comparative analysis of Phraseological units.

This section examines their grammatical structure, meanings, etymology, as well as their semantic and imagery-based characteristics.

1. "A drop in the ocean" is English phrase. It is a phraseological unit that means a very small or insignificant amount compared to something much larger, having almost no noticeable effect on the whole. Grammatically, this phrase is a noun phrase. In a sentence, it usually follows a linking verb (like be, seem, or appear) and describes the degree or insignificance of something compared to a much larger whole. Structure: Subject + Linking Verb + a drop in the ocean. Now that we have analyzed its structural features, the phrase also possesses a notable etymological background that reflects its historical development and figurative usage in the English language. The phrase 'a drop in the ocean' reflects the idea of a very small or insignificant amount, and its etymological development shows how the word 'drop' has evolved in meaning over time. The sense of "a minute quantity of anything, or the smallest possible amount" dates back to around c. 1200, when the word "drop" was used to describe extremely small quantities in contrast to larger masses or volumes [12]. For example, *"Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"* [4; 24]. In this context, "a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean" means that the speaker's trade activities are extremely small and unimportant compared to his real moral duties and responsibilities. By this phrase, we can describe scale and impact. In addition to this, *"I don't know where she was going, but we saw her run, such a little, little creature in her womanly bonnet and apron, through a covered way at the bottom of the court and melt into the city's strife and sound like a dewdrop in an ocean"*[5; 327]. In this sentence, the author is highlighting the contrast between human weakness and the vast, uncontrolled life of the city, showing how a person can easily become invisible or lost in a big urban environment. So he used this phrase.

2. A breath of fresh air" is also English phrase. It means something or someone new and positive that brings a refreshing change or relief to a situation. Grammatically, this phrase is a noun phrase. In a sentence, it often follows a linking verb (like be, seem, or feel) and describes something or someone that brings a sense of renewal, positivity, or improvement to a situation. Structure: Subject + Linking Verb + a breath of fresh air. Now that we have examined its structure, the phrase also has an important etymological background. The meaning of "fresh" as "new or recent" dates back to around the 13th century. The changes in

form and the expanded meanings such as “new,” “pure,” and “eager” were likely influenced by Old French *fres* (modern French *frais*, meaning “fresh” or “cool”), which originates from Proto-Germanic *frisko-* and is related to the English word [13]. For example, *‘Then I do,’ said Sikes, more in the spirit of obstinacy than because he had any real objection to the girl going where she listed. ‘Nowhere. Sit down.’*

‘I’m not well. I told you that before,’ rejoined the girl. ‘I want a breath of air’ [6; 525]. In this context, The girl is saying she wants to go outside to get some fresh air / ventilation because she is feeling unwell. Moreover, *She pointed out the difficulty of getting a purchaser. He held out the hope of finding one; but she asked him how she should manage to sell it.*

‘Haven’t you your power of attorney?’ he replied.

The phrase came to her like a breath of fresh air. ‘Leave me the bill,’ said Emma [7; 355]. In this context, In this context, the phrase “a breath of fresh air” is used to describe a sudden feeling of relief and mental clarity that the woman experiences when she hears a helpful idea, which gives her hope and a possible solution to her problem.

3. “Under the weather” is also an English phrase that means feeling slightly ill or unwell, especially in a mild or temporary way. It is often used when a person does not have serious illness but feels weak, tired, or not in good health. The origin of the phrase is linked to the idea that bad weather can affect a person’s physical condition or mood. Grammatically, it is a prepositional phrase. “Under the weather” functions as a predicate complement after a linking verb (such as *be*, *feel*, or *seem*) and describes the state of a person’s health. Historically, The figurative sense of “weather” (v.) dates back to the 1650s, meaning to withstand or survive difficulties such as trouble or danger. It originates from the noun “weather,” with the metaphorical idea of a ship successfully riding out a storm without damage or loss [14]. For instance, *“He won’t bother me today. I stomped most of yesterday’s work to death anyway.”*

He’s sympathetic. Then he adds, The boy is a bit under the weather with flu, does she mind? he truly wants to come? “If you don’t think he’s going to keel over or anything” [8; 207]. In this context, “under the weather” is used to describe that the boy is slightly ill with flu and not feeling well enough to function normally. Furthermore, *“So hokay? You know where you are now? Third floor the Tower, all over the shower... or are you still a bit under the weather?”* [8; 215]. In this context, “under the weather” means that the person is still feeling slightly ill, weak, or not fully recovered, and the speaker is asking whether this is still the case.

4. “Break the ice” is an English phrase that means to start a conversation or reduce tension in a social situation, especially among people who do not know each other well. It is used when someone tries to make a situation more relaxed, friendly, or comfortable. The origin of the phrase comes from the literal idea of breaking ice on a frozen river to allow ships to pass, which later developed into a metaphor for overcoming initial social awkwardness. Grammatically, it is a verb phrase in the base form, where the verb “break” is followed by the object “the ice,” and it functions as a transitive phrasal expression. Historically, the phrase “to break the ice,” meaning “to make the first opening or initiate social interaction,” dates back to the 1580s. It is metaphorically based on breaking river ice to create a passage for boats. In modern usage, it is commonly associated with overcoming social awkwardness or “cold

reserve” between people[15]. For example, *But she refused him resolutely, feeling that to accept him would be an act of treachery to her son, though Dardanelov had, to judge from certain mysterious symptoms, reason for believing that he was not an object of aversion to the charming but too chaste and tender-hearted widow. Kolya’s mad prank seemed to have broken the ice, and Dardanelov was rewarded for his intercession by a suggestion of hope* [9; 870]. In this sentence, “break the ice” means that Kolya’s prank helped remove the social awkwardness and emotional distance between the people involved, making their relationship more open and hopeful for further interaction. In addition to this, *One morning, being left alone with him a few minutes in the parlour, I ventured to approach the window-recess— which his table, chair, and desk consecrated as a kind of study—and I was going to speak, though not very well knowing in what words to frame my inquiry—for it is at all times difficult to break the ice of reserve glassing over such natures as his—when he saved me the trouble by being the first to commence a dialogue* [10; 537]. In this sentence, “break the ice (of reserve)” means that it is difficult to overcome the man’s cold, quiet, and emotionally closed nature in order to start a conversation with him, as he appears distant and unapproachable at first.

In conclusion, this article has looked at several English phraseological units based on nature, such as “a drop in the ocean,” “a breath of fresh air,” “under the weather,” and “break the ice.” These expressions show that language is not only a way of communication but also a reflection of human experience and imagination. Most of these phrases carry meanings that go beyond their literal words and are strongly connected with real-life situations and nature. Overall, understanding such expressions helps learners use English more naturally and also gives a better understanding of how people think and express feelings in everyday communication.

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