

UDC 811.161.2'27:316.48

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/2522-4077-2025-215-3>

SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS OF UKRAINIAN AND ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGY IN CONFLICT DISCOURSE

СЕМАНТИКА І ПРАГМАТИКА ФРАЗЕОЛОГІЇ УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ТА АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВ У КОНФЛІКТНОМУ ДИСКУРСІ

Harbera I. V.,

orcid.org/0000-0001-5365-054X

*Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor,
Head of the Department of General and Applied Linguistics and Slavic Philology,
Vasyl' Stus Donetsk National University*

The article offers a comprehensive comparative analysis of the semantic and pragmatic characteristics of conflictogenic phraseology in Ukrainian and English, functioning within conflict discourse. The study is based on empirical material and demonstrates that phraseological units play a key role in verbalising various types of conflict situations, as they encode behavioural models, cultural perceptions of acceptable and unacceptable confrontation, and the ways in which the actions of interaction participants are evaluated. The article argues that the conflictogenic potential of idioms is determined by their ability to describe, intensify, or interpret different forms of conflict – verbal, physical, psychological, or hybrid. Based on the systematisation of Ukrainian and English phraseological material, four symmetrical lexical-semantic fields are identified: “Verbal conflict”, “Physical conflict”, “Hybrid conflict”, and “Conflict context”. Each field exhibits its own structural organisation, metaphorical foundations, and pragmatic functions. The study shows that Ukrainian phraseology predominantly actualises conflict occurring “here and now”, emphasising the dynamics of quarrelling, emotional tension, and the aggressor’s actions. A significant proportion of the units represents small-scale domestic or situational altercations, as well as combinations of verbal and physical aggression. In contrast, English phraseology more commonly denotes large-scale or intense confrontations, including those with force-based imagery, and is distinguished by the presence of stable expressions that signal the mitigation or resolution of a dispute – patterns not observed in the Ukrainian material. Within the field of “Hybrid conflict”, idioms are identified that combine physical, psychological, and communicative mechanisms of pressure. The “Conflict context” field demonstrates the greatest culturally conditioned asymmetry between the two languages: English phraseology actively encodes avoidance strategies, manipulative schemes, or observer roles, whereas the Ukrainian system more often reflects pre-conflict and post-conflict states, as well as expressions that support or encourage aggressive behaviour. Overall, the study concludes that both languages possess a high potential for the formation of conflictogenic phraseology; however, differences in metaphorical models, the scale of the situations represented, and the pragmatic functions of idioms reflect culturally specific cognitive and communicative norms. The research underscores the importance of incorporating phraseological resources into the analysis of conflict communication and outlines prospects for further classification of idioms into more fine-grained lexical-semantic groups, taking into account authentic contexts of use.

Key words: conflict discourse, phraseological unit, conflictogenicity, semantics, pragmatics, lexical-semantic field, verbal conflict, physical conflict, hybrid conflict, Ukrainian and English phraseology.

Статтю присвячено комплексному зіставному аналізу семантичних і прагматичних характеристик конфліктогенної фразеології української та англійської мов, що функціонує в конфліктному дискурсі. Дослідження ґрунтовано на фактичному матеріалі й демонструє, що фразеологічні одиниці відіграють ключову роль у вербалізації різних типів конфліктних ситуацій, оскільки фіксують моделі поведінки, культурні уявлення про допустиме / недопустиме протистояння та способи оцінювання дій учасників взаємодії. У статті обґрунтовано, що конфліктогенність фразеологізмів визначається їх здатністю описувати, інтенсифікувати або інтерпретувати різні форми конфлікту – вербального, фізичного, психологічного чи змішаного. На основі систематизації українського й англійського фразеологічного матеріалу виокремлено чотири симетричні лексико-семантичні поля: «Вербальний конфлікт», «Фізичний конфлікт», «Гібридний конфлікт»

і «Контекст конфлікту». Кожне поле має власну структуру, метафоричну природу та набір прагматичних функцій. Показано, що українська фразеологія переважно актуалізує конфлікт, який відбувається «тут і тепер», наголошуючи на динаміці сварки, емоційній напрузі та агресивних діях суб'єкта. Значна частина одиниць відтворює невеликі побутові або ситуативні сутички, а також поєднання вербальної та фізичної агресії. Натомість англійська фразеологія частіше репрезентує масштабні чи інтенсивні конфлікти, зокрема з силовою образністю, а також вирізняється наявністю сталих виразів, що позначають пом'якшення або завершення суперечки, чого не спостерігаємо в українському мовному матеріалі. У полі «Гібридний конфлікт» виявлено фразеологізми, що поєднують фізичні, психологічні й комунікативні механізми тиску. Поле «Контекст конфлікту» демонструє найбільшу культурно зумовлену асиметрію між двома мовами: англійська фразеологія активно кодує стратегії уникнення, маніпулятивні схеми або соціальні ролі спостерігача, тоді як українська система частіше фіксує передконфліктні та постконфліктні стани, підтримку або заохочення агресивної поведінки. Узагальнено, що обидві мови мають високий потенціал для формування конфліктогенної фразеології, однак відмінності метафоричних моделей, масштабності описуваних ситуацій та прагматичних функцій одиниць відображають специфіку національних когнітивних і комунікативних норм. Дослідження підкреслює важливість залучення фразеологічних ресурсів до аналізу конфліктної комунікації та визначає перспективи класифікації фразеологізмів на рівні дрібніших лексико-семантичних груп з урахуванням автентичних ситуацій уживання.

Ключові слова: конфліктний дискурс, фразеологічна одиниця, конфліктогенність, семантика, прагматика, лексико-семантичне поле, вербальний конфлікт, фізичний конфлікт, гібридний конфлікт, українська та англійська фразеологія.

Statement of the scientific problem. Phraseological units preserve not only the collective socio-cultural experience of a linguistic community but also its deeply rooted cognitive models that regulate attitudes toward confrontation, disagreement, and cooperation. They encapsulate culturally shared scripts of behaviour, value systems, emotional reactions, and socially approved or disapproved communicative strategies. As previous linguistic and ethnolinguistic research demonstrates, phraseology stores evaluative, emotional, and cognitive information about national attitudes toward conflicts, norms of verbal interaction, and acceptable strategies for resolving disagreements, thereby functioning as a condensed repository of conflict-related cultural knowledge.

Because conflicts unfold and escalate primarily through language, phraseological units play a crucial role in framing the interpretation of a conflict situation: they categorise opponents, assign roles, evaluate intentions, and determine whether a communicative act is perceived as confrontational, neutral, or conciliatory. In this sense, conflict discourse cannot be fully understood without a thorough examination of its phraseological dimension, as idioms and fixed expressions often provide the most explicit clues about how a particular linguistic community conceptualises aggression, insult, rivalry, discord, or reconciliation.

The relevance of this expanded research also derives from contemporary sociocultural dynamics: increasing intercultural contact, accelerated global mobility, and widespread multilingual communication have intensified situations in which phraseological meanings become sites of misinterpretation and pragmatic tension. Therefore, conflict communication must be analysed not merely as a social or psychological process, but as a linguistically encoded phenomenon whose internal structure, interpretative potential, and pragmatic effects are shaped by culturally informed phraseological systems.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Modern linguistic scholarship shows a steady expansion of interest in phraseology as a core component of cognitive, cultural, and interpersonal communication processes. In both Western and Ukrainian linguistics, idioms are increasingly viewed not merely as stylistic devices but as concentrated repositories of culturally encoded knowledge that shape communicative behaviour, including patterns of conflict interaction. Such an understanding is well supported in major English-language studies, which demonstrate that idioms operate through stable metaphorical structures and culturally shaped conceptual mappings. Research by [1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7] consistently shows that idiomatic meanings emerge from embodied conceptualisation, evaluative schemata, and socially shared models of interaction. Such mechanisms are particularly salient in

conflict discourse, where idioms frequently encode confrontation, incompatibility, emotional escalation, or strategic negotiation.

In cognitive linguistics, metaphor theory (especially the work of Z. Kövecses [3]) has provided a detailed account of how abstract situations of tension or disagreement are conceptualised through bodily or spatial source domains – most commonly in metaphors of battle, pressure, competition, or divergence. Complementarily, research on figurative language processing (e.g., S. Glucksberg [2]) highlights how idioms function pragmatically to express collective attitudes, intensify evaluation, and construct social alignment or opposition, all of which are crucial for conflict interaction. M. Strakšienė's work [6] further emphasises the cultural embeddedness of idioms by demonstrating how translation across languages often results in semantic shifts or pragmatic distortions that may provoke communicative misunderstanding.

Recent Ukrainian linguistic research provides an equally substantial foundation for the study of phraseology within conflict communication. Scholars emphasise the role of idioms in articulating social norms, communicative expectations, and culturally shaped emotional patterns. Works by [8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14] highlight that Ukrainian phraseology actively encodes models of interpersonal behaviour ranging from solidarity and cooperation to aggression, rivalry, or verbal domination. These studies draw attention to the evaluative and expressive nature of Ukrainian idioms, showing how figurative expressions mark attitudes toward participants of interaction, signal emotional states, establish hierarchy, or frame the communicative situation as confrontational.

Ukrainian pragmatic research further demonstrates that linguistic conflict frequently arises from misaligned expectations, communicative strategies, and culturally conditioned norms of politeness or impoliteness. Analyses of conflict discourse (notably in the works of [2; 5]) reveal how specific linguistic choices – lexical, intonational, phraseological – can escalate or mitigate confrontation. This aligns with the broader European and American tradition in which idioms are treated as high-impact pragmatic markers capable of intensifying emotional tone, framing blame or responsibility, or activating culturally salient conflict scripts.

Of particular relevance for comparative linguistics is the observation that Ukrainian and English phraseological systems display both structural parallels and significant divergences in how they represent conflict situations. Both languages develop extensive sets of idioms describing disagreement, verbal opposition, emotional escalation, or competitive interaction, yet the metaphorical bases and pragmatic functions of these units often differ. Cross-linguistic discrepancies in idiomatic meaning, connotation, or usage norms may lead to communicative misinterpretations, especially in intercultural contexts – a point repeatedly stressed in translation-oriented and intercultural communication research [2; 6].

Overall, recent scholarship demonstrates a clear methodological and theoretical foundation for studying the semantic and pragmatic properties of conflict-related phraseology. International research underscores the cognitive and metaphorical mechanisms behind idiom formation, while Ukrainian studies focus on communicative, pragmatic, and cultural functions of phraseological units in real interaction. The present article continues this line of inquiry by integrating both perspectives into a comparative semantic-pragmatic analysis of English and Ukrainian idioms functioning in conflict discourse.

The aim of the article is to conduct a comparative analysis of the semantic and pragmatic properties of Ukrainian and English phraseological units used to represent and structure conflict discourse. To achieve this aim, the article sets out to: identify the key semantic features and metaphorical models underlying conflict-related phraseology in both languages; examine the pragmatic functions of idioms in signalling, escalating, or mitigating communicative conflict; compare Ukrainian and English phraseological representations of conflict and outline their culturally specific characteristics.

Presentation of the main material. Conflictogenic potential constitutes the central defining feature of the phraseological units examined in this study. These expressions function as stable figurative

constructs with evaluative colouring, used across various types of conflict interaction – verbal, physical, psychological, and others. Conflict interaction is understood here as a communicative process shaped by the collision of differing views, needs, and values, accompanied by tension and the intensification of contradictions, and realised when an individual intentionally or spontaneously employs communicative actions that may harm another person. Thus, the conflictogenicity of a phraseological unit refers to its capacity to participate organically in conflict communication: it may be used actively by the interlocutors themselves or serve as an external means of describing, characterising, or evaluating conflict situations. In the course of analysis, several key lexical-semantic fields (LSFs) relevant to both languages were identified.

LSF “Verbal conflict” (Ukrainian data)

This field includes phraseological units that:

1. Describe the initiation of a verbal conflict: *багнети (мечі, списи і т.ін.) схрешуються* – ‘someone enters into sharp disagreement or polemics with another’; *вченитися в горлянку* – ‘to engage in fierce argument or quarrel with someone, persistently demanding something’.

2. Represent the unfolding of a verbal altercation (these units refer to active verbal aggression occurring “here and now,” typically from the aggressor’s perspective): *брати в шори* – ‘to scold or berate someone’; *давати духу* – ‘to scold harshly’; *давати дрозда* – ‘to reprimand severely’; *тикати під ніс кистіці* – ‘to scold someone’; *ханати за горло* – ‘to quarrel, to verbally attack’; *брати в роботу* – ‘to scold or reproach someone for something’; *скребти моркву* – ‘to reproach or scold someone’; *давати чосу* – ‘to criticise sharply’; *робити сцену* – ‘to have a quarrel with someone, expressing dissatisfaction’; *хатня морква* – ‘a family quarrel, typically between spouses’; *кипить, як у казані* – ‘a quarrel or dispute is taking place’.

3. Convey the result of a completed verbal conflict: *чорна кішка пробігла*; *чорний кіт пробіг* – ‘a quarrel or disagreement has occurred between people’.

Overall, most Ukrainian phraseological units depict a verbal conflict in progress, highlighting the aggressor’s immediate verbal actions (scolding, reproaching, attacking).

LSF “Verbal conflict” (English data)

In English, the majority of phraseological units likewise describe the active process of verbal confrontation, usually in the present tense: *be at each others’ throats* – ‘to argue or quarrel intensely’; *cross swords* – ‘to argue or debate’; *fight like cat and dog* – ‘to constantly quarrel’; *chop logic* – ‘to argue pedantically to the point of exhaustion’; *add fuel to the fire* – ‘to provoke or escalate a conflict’; *at loggerheads* – ‘in strong disagreement or dispute’; *go to the mat* – ‘to argue energetically, often defending a cause or person’; *have a bone to pick with someone* – ‘to have reasons for disagreement or irritation’; *play devil’s advocate* – ‘to argue the opposing view, often intentionally’; *sparks fly* – ‘a debate becomes heated or lively’; *part brass rags with* – ‘to quarrel and end a friendship’; *apple of discord* – ‘an object or issue causing dispute’; *a bone of contention* – ‘a point of disagreement’.

Notably, only English contains phraseological units explicitly referring to ending or mitigating verbal conflict: *agree to differ* – ‘to stop arguing because no agreement is possible’; *pour oil on troubled waters* – ‘to calm a disagreement or quarrel’.

LSF “Physical conflict” (Ukrainian data)

Ukrainian expressions predominantly describe small-scale, everyday altercations, often combining physical confrontation with verbal aggression: *аж чуби тріщать* – ‘with fights and shouting’; *у потилицю гнати* – ‘to drive someone out roughly, with insults and possibly physical force’; *у три ший гнати* – ‘to expel someone violently’; *бруднити руки* – ‘to become involved in something indecent or dishonest (often in the context of fighting)’; *руки короткі* – ‘a warning meaning “You will not succeed!” usually in a fight’.

A smaller set denotes large-scale physical confrontation: *багнети схрешуються* – ‘to enter battle or struggle’; *давати бій* – ‘to offer strong resistance; to fight’.

LSF “Physical conflict” (English data)

English phraseology, in contrast, tends to represent large-scale or intense physical confrontation: *fight tooth and nail* – ‘to fight fiercely’; *shoot it out* – ‘to engage in an armed showdown’; *a running battle* – ‘a prolonged fight’; *passage of arms* – ‘a serious fight’; *lock horns* – ‘to enter conflict’; *try a fall with* – ‘to challenge or fight someone’.

LSF “Hybrid conflict” (Ukrainian data)

These units refer to complex conflict situations that combine physical, verbal, psychological, or social elements: *брати за петельки* – ‘to force someone to act by threatening physical violence during an argument’; *брати за барки* – ‘to intimidate someone physically during a quarrel’; *заварилася каша* – ‘a quarrel, fight, or total disorder has erupted’; *хоч водою розливай* – ‘someone cannot be stopped during a fight or quarrel’.

LSF “Hybrid conflict” (English data)

This field includes phraseological units that: *a war of nerves* – ‘a struggle aimed at exhausting the opponent psychologically’; *at cross purposes* – ‘a misunderstanding caused by differing aims’; *battle of the giants* – ‘a confrontation between two powerful sides’.

LSF “Conflict context” (Ukrainian data)

This field includes phraseological units that:

1. Encourage involvement in conflict: *вбивати клин* – ‘to create discord or divide people’; *так його!* – ‘a phrase encouraging someone to continue aggressive behaviour’.
2. Denote long-standing poor relations: *мати контри* – ‘to be on bad terms’; *мати рахунки* – ‘to have unresolved conflict’.
3. Characterise a conflict-prone person: *базарна баба* – ‘a loud, quarrelsome person’.
4. Indicate reconciliation after conflict: *серце повертається* – ‘someone regains affection or sympathy after a disagreement’.
5. Signal danger or looming conflict: *пахне порохом* – ‘danger or conflict is approaching’; *пахне смаленим вовком* – ‘trouble or danger is anticipated’.

LSF “Conflict context” (English data)

English phraseology denotes:

1. Readiness for conflict: *on the warpath* – ‘ready for confrontation’; *at daggers drawn* – ‘in a state of intense hostility’.
2. Potential conflict: *wigs on the green* – ‘a turbulent or unpleasant development’; *cut and thrust* – ‘a competitive or conflict-driven environment’.
3. Manipulation aimed at creating conflict: *divide and rule* – ‘to maintain advantage by fostering divisions’.
4. Observing conflict without participating: *hold the ring* – ‘to oversee a dispute without intervening’.
5. Support within a conflict: *take up the cudgels* – ‘to vigorously support someone’.
6. Provoking conflict: *trail your coat* – ‘to deliberately provoke a quarrel or fight’.

Conclusions. It can be concluded that, first, Ukrainian and English demonstrate an equally strong potential for the creation and active functioning of conflictogenic phraseological units. This is confirmed by the symmetrical identification of the four major lexical-semantic fields in both languages – “Verbal conflict”, “Physical conflict”, “Hybrid conflict”, and “Conflict context” – each of which contains a rich inventory of figurative expressions that encode confrontation, tension, and interactional antagonism. Second, despite certain shared features and cross-linguistic regularities in the phraseological representation of conflict semantics, a number of important differences become evident. The similarities include, for example, the tendency of both languages to describe the unfolding of verbal conflict in the present tense within the LSF “Verbal conflict”, as well as the presence of psychological strategies and pressure mechanisms within the LSF “Hybrid conflict”. However, these parallels are accompanied by clear divergences. English phraseology uniquely incorporates expres-

sions that explicitly denote the mitigation or termination of verbal confrontation, whereas Ukrainian phraseology lacks such systematic representation within the same field. In contrast, Ukrainian units within the LSF “Physical conflict” tend to depict small-scale, domestic, or situational physical altercations, often intertwined with verbal aggression, while English units in the corresponding field predominantly portray large-scale or intense physical confrontations, sometimes with militaristic or dramatic overtones. The LSF “Conflict context” reveals perhaps the most pronounced cross-linguistic asymmetry: the two languages organise and conceptualise contextual cues, behavioural patterns, and social perception of conflict in fundamentally different ways, reflecting distinct cultural models of interpersonal behaviour, conflict escalation, and conflict management. Going forward, the study aims to conduct a more fine-grained analysis of the identified LSFs by dividing them into smaller lexical-semantic groups and subgroups. Particular attention will be given to authentic usage contexts, which are essential for understanding the pragmatic behaviour, communicative functions, and conflictogenic potential of the phraseological units in both languages.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

1. Cacciari C., Tabossi P. Idioms: Processing, Structure and Interpretation. Hillsdale, NJ : Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1993. 447 p.
2. Glucksberg S. Understanding Figurative Language: From Metaphors to Idioms. New York : Oxford Univ. Press, 2001. 214 p.
3. Kövecses Z. Metaphor: A Practical Introduction. Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, 2002. 285 p.
4. Seidl J., McMordie W. English Idioms and How to Use Them. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988. 247 p.
5. Siefiring J. Oxford Dictionary of Idioms. Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, 2004. 340 p.
6. Strakšienė M. The Analysis of Idiom Translation Strategies from English into Lithuanian. Kaunas: Vytautas Magnus Univ. Press, 2009. 128 p.
7. Kvetko P. English Lexicology in Theory and Practice. Bratislava : Univerzita Komenského, 2009. 232 p.
8. Гриджук О.М. Українська фразеологія в когнітивному та комунікативному аспектах. Івано-Франківськ : Прикарпатський нац. ун-т, 2017. 240 с.
9. Колодяжна О.В. Прагматика українського мовлення: конфліктність, ввічливість, стратегії впливу. К. : Довіра, 2018. 198 с.
10. Мацевко-Бекерська Л.В. Сучасна українська фразеологія: семантика, функції, прагматика. Л. : Львів. нац. ун-т ім. І. Франка, 2013. 284 с.
11. Почепцов Г.Г. Сучасні комунікації: медіа, конфлікти, маніпуляції. К. : Либідь, 2014. 256 с.
12. Селігей П.О. Мовна особистість і конфліктний дискурс: природа, стратегії, тактики. К.: Видавничий дім «Києво-Могилянська академія», 2012. 312 с.
13. Селіверстова О.М. Семантика і прагматика висловлення. К. : Наукова думка, 1999. 208 с.
14. Шевченко Л.І., Соловійова О.М. Медіалінгвістика: конфлікт, маніпуляція, дискурс. К. : КМ-Академія, 2020. 220 с.

Дата надходження статті: 28.11.2025

Дата прийняття статті: 22.12.2025

Опубліковано: 30.12.2025