

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF ANTHROPOCENTRIC PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN “THE GRAPES OF WRATH”

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Abstract:

This article presents a contextual analysis of anthropocentric phraseological units in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Focusing on the socio-cultural context, the paper explores how these phraseological units reflect the characters' emotional states, social realities, and collective experiences during the Great Depression. The study examines the role of language in shaping identity, highlighting the use of phraseological units to convey themes of survival, resilience, and social critique. Through a comparative analysis with other literary works, the article underscores the power of language in expressing human struggles and societal inequalities. The research offers valuable insights into the linguistic and cultural dimensions of Steinbeck's novel, contributing to the broader understanding of phraseology in literary discourse.

Key words: anthropocentric phraseological units, *The Grapes of Wrath*, socio-cultural context, language and identity, social critique, survival, resilience, American Dream, literary analysis, Steinbeck.

Introduction

Human-centeredness is a central focus in modern linguistics, making the anthropocentric analysis of phraseological units one of the most relevant areas of research. Anthropocentrism, which examines the role and position of humans in language, has become a key approach for understanding the semantic and pragmatic features of phraseological units in literary texts. This article aims to analyze the contextual use of anthropocentric phraseological units in John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. The novel is rich in phraseological expressions closely tied to the social reality and everyday life of its characters, reflecting the socio-cultural context of the time. These phraseological units not only enhance the artistic depth of the text but also reveal the individuality of the characters' speech and contribute to the broader thematic and stylistic aspects of the novel.

By exploring the semantic and pragmatic functions of these units, the article seeks to uncover how they serve to express anthropocentric principles and strengthen the novel's artistic impact. In doing so, it highlights the importance of phraseological expressions in conveying cultural identity, emotional nuance, and the social dynamics of the depicted era. This analysis ultimately aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the linguistic richness embedded in *The Grapes of Wrath* and its relevance to anthropocentric linguistics.

Semantic-Pragmatic Approaches to Phraseological Unit

Phraseological units are an essential component of any language, serving as key markers of its expressiveness, richness, and cultural identity. These units consist of stable word combinations whose meanings often cannot be deduced from the meanings of the individual words. They are categorized into various types based on their structure, meaning, and usage, including idioms, collocations, and proverbs. Phraseological units are not only linguistic but also deeply connected to the cultural and social realities of the speakers. As Buranova and Ruziyeva (2024) emphasize, anthropocentric idioms in contemporary English literature reflect the socio-cultural realities of speakers and contribute to the linguistic richness of the text by embedding human experiences, emotions, and values in stable expressions [3; 11].

One of the most important linguistic approaches in the analysis of phraseological units is anthropocentrism, which focuses on the central role of humans in language. Anthropocentrism in linguistics suggests that human experience, perspective, and values shape the way language is structured and used. In the context of phraseological analysis, this approach explores how phraseological units reflect human-centered concepts such as emotions, actions, beliefs, and social interactions.

The semantic-pragmatic analysis of phraseological units investigates the multiple layers of meaning these expressions convey in different contexts. It considers not only the literal meaning but also the implicit messages, emotional nuances, and social functions embedded in the expressions. According to Crystal (1987), phraseological expressions serve as a reflection of social conventions, shared cultural knowledge, and collective experience, making them essential to effective communication [4;125]. This type of analysis is crucial in understanding how phraseological units enhance communication, convey cultural values, and

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contribute to the overall meaning of a text, especially in literary works where they are used to create depth, characterize individuals, and reflect broader societal issues.

The Socio-Cultural Context of Phraseological Units in *The Grapes of Wrath*

Continuing from the theoretical foundations, the contextual analysis of anthropocentric phraseological units in *The Grapes of Wrath* reveals the intricate relationship between language, society, and the human experience. In this section, we will explore how phraseological units are used within the socio-cultural context of the novel, how they function in the speech of the characters, and their role in enhancing the artistic and semantic dimensions of the text.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, phraseological units are deeply tied to the socio-cultural realities of the characters. The novel's setting—the Dust Bowl era—provides a backdrop where these linguistic units express not only the harsh realities of the time but also the emotional and psychological states of the characters. As Kövecses (2002) argues, anthropocentric metaphors and phraseological expressions often mirror the emotional and cognitive states of individuals, shaping how they perceive and interpret the world [11; 45]. For instance, the phrase "to be on the road" is used throughout the novel to represent the Joad family's physical journey but also reflects their emotional and existential struggles. This phrase encapsulates the plight of the migrant workers and their constant movement in search of survival. It carries a broader socio-cultural meaning, symbolizing the hardships faced by displaced people during the Great Depression.

When compared to phrases used in other literary works, such as "on the road" in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, we see a different tone and context. In Kerouac's work, the phrase conveys a sense of freedom and adventure, often associated with the countercultural movement. However, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the same phrase signifies a desperate journey filled with suffering, a metaphor for the disillusionment and struggle of the working class. This contrast highlights the way in which the same phraseological unit can acquire varying meanings depending on the socio-cultural context in which it is used.

The characters' speech in *The Grapes of Wrath* further demonstrates the role of anthropocentric phraseological units in shaping their identities and reflecting their circumstances. Take the phrase "I'll take what I can get," which is often uttered by the migrant workers in response to their difficult lives. This phrase not only expresses the characters' acceptance of their fate but also serves as a coping mechanism, showing their resilience in the face of adversity. In this context, the phrase emphasizes the human-centered themes of perseverance, survival, and the negotiation of power within an unjust society.

A comparative analysis with phrases used in other works, such as "take it as it comes" in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, reveals different nuances in the expression of human experience. In Fitzgerald's novel, the phrase reflects a sense of disillusionment with the American Dream and a resignation to the inevitable. In contrast, in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, the phrase is imbued with a more hopeful, yet realistic, acceptance of hardship—a collective determination to endure and fight for survival. This comparison underscores how the same phrase can take on distinct emotional and thematic weight depending on the characters' circumstances and the social context in which they exist.

Beyond the individual speech patterns, phraseological units in *The Grapes of Wrath* also enhance the artistic depth of the novel. One such example is the phrase "a land of opportunity," which initially holds an optimistic connotation for the Joad family as they journey westward. However, as the novel progresses, this phrase transforms into a bitter irony, symbolizing the false promises and exploitation faced by the migrant workers. This shift in meaning reflects the core theme of the novel: the gap between the idealized image of the American Dream and the harsh reality experienced by the disenfranchised.

Similarly, in other works like *The Great Gatsby*, the phrase "the American Dream" also shifts in meaning from hope to disillusionment. While in Steinbeck's novel, the phrase becomes a symbol of betrayal and broken promises, Fitzgerald uses it to critique the moral decay and social inequality of 1920s America. The evolution of these phrases in both works illustrates how phraseological units can serve as powerful tools for social commentary, exposing the gap between human aspirations and societal realities.

Conclusion

The analysis of anthropocentric phraseological units in *The Grapes of Wrath* demonstrates how language reflects the characters' emotional states and the socio-cultural realities they face. These expressions not only enhance the realism of the narrative but also serve as a powerful tool for social critique, highlighting themes of survival, resilience, and the disillusionment of the American Dream. By examining how these phrases evolve in meaning throughout the novel, we see how they contribute to the broader artistic and thematic development. This study emphasizes the crucial role of phraseological units in conveying human struggles and offers a deeper understanding of the linguistic and cultural layers of the text.

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