

PRAGMATIC FEATURES OF ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS CONTAINING THE LEXEMES “GOOD” AND “BAD”

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Abstract

This article examines the pragmatic features of English phraseological units containing the lexemes “good” and “bad”. The study focuses on the relationship between phraseological meaning, contextual interpretation, speaker intention, evaluation, emotional expressiveness, cultural identification, stylistic variation, and social positioning. The theoretical discussion draws on the approaches of Charles Morris, Geoffrey Leech, Sh. Safarov, Isro Burhoniddin Abdurrahman, N. M. Shansky, N. A. Lukyanova, A. V. Kunin, V. N. Teliya, and other scholars cited in the source material. The empirical part analyzes phraseological expressions such as “a good egg”, “bad blood”, “give a good account of yourself”, “have something on good authority”, “good call”, “in someone’s good/bad books”, “of good cheer”, “be in good company”, “put a brave face on something”, “so far, so good”, “give as good as you get”, “while the going is good”, “all to the good”, “as good as”, and “as good as gold”. The analysis demonstrates that the pragmatic interpretation of these units depends substantially on context and that the lexemes “good” and “bad” frequently function as carriers of positive or negative evaluation, emotional and expressive meaning, cultural associations, and interpersonal positioning.

Keywords: *phraseological units, pragmatics, phraseological meaning, “good”, “bad”, contextual meaning, evaluation, connotation, linguoculture.*

1. Introduction

Phraseological units constitute an important component of language because they convey meanings that are often richer than the literal meanings of their individual constituents. In the case of English expressions containing the lexemes “good” and “bad”, the lexical meanings of these adjectives interact with fixed phraseological structures and contextual factors to produce a wide range of pragmatic effects. Therefore, before analyzing such units, it is necessary to clarify the concept of pragmatics and its relevance to phraseological interpretation.

Pragmatics is concerned with the analysis of meaning as expressed by a speaker or writer and understood by a listener or reader.[1] Consequently, rather than focusing exclusively on the dictionary meaning of linguistic units, pragmatics examines what people intend to communicate through their expressions. In this sense, pragmatics can be regarded as the study of speaker intention.

Within Charles Morris’s semiotic framework, language may be considered from three perspectives: syntax concerns the relations among signs; semantics concerns the relationship between signs and what they signify; and pragmatics concerns the relationship between signs and their users.[2] Geoffrey Leech likewise emphasizes speaker intention, contextual conditions, and the

hearer's interpretation. He describes pragmatics as the study of how linguistic units are used with particular intentions and how those intentions are interpreted by the hearer.[3; 4]

Sh. S. Safarov, synthesizing approaches to linguopragmatics, stresses that communicative activity is based on the concept of activity, language functions as a means regulating interaction between participants, and linguistic activity is directly connected with the communicative environment.[5] Isro Burhoniddin Abdurrahman similarly relates pragmatics to the speaker's point of view and intended meaning.[6] These approaches demonstrate that phraseological meaning cannot be adequately interpreted without considering context, communicative intention, and the relationship between interlocutors.

The present study therefore addresses the following objective: to identify and characterize the principal pragmatic functions and connotative patterns of English phraseological units containing "good" and "bad", with particular attention to their contextual, evaluative, emotional, stylistic, and linguocultural properties.

2. Materials and Methods

The study is based on the phraseological examples and theoretical sources presented in the original research material. The analysis employs descriptive, contextual, semantic-pragmatic, and linguocultural approaches. First, the selected phraseological units are described in terms of their established meanings and structural stability. Second, their meanings are interpreted in the contexts provided in the source material. Third, the pragmatic functions of the units are identified with reference to speaker intention, evaluation, emotional expressiveness, irony, cultural identification, communicative economy, stylistic variation, and social positioning. Finally, the units are grouped according to their dominant connotative orientation: positive, negative, or neutral.

The analytical procedure treats context as a central interpretive factor. A phraseological unit considered in isolation primarily provides its conventional dictionary meaning, whereas contextual use may reveal additional pragmatic and connotative information. Accordingly, the examples are analyzed not only as fixed linguistic structures but also as communicative resources functioning in particular social and cultural environments.

3. Results

3.1. The pragmatic role of context

Pragmatic interpretation depends on the assumptions and expectations shared by interlocutors. The listener combines the meanings of words, their combinations, and the context in which they occur in order to infer what information the speaker intends to communicate and what attitude the speaker adopts toward that information. Context is therefore indispensable for identifying pragmatic meaning.

The source material identifies seven major pragmatic functions of phraseological units: (1) emotional and expressive function; (2) evaluative function; (3) ironic function; (4) cultural identification; (5) communicative brevity and precision; (6) stylistic diversity; and (7) expression of social roles. These functions provide a framework for interpreting phraseological units containing "good" and "bad".

The contextual importance of phraseological meaning is illustrated by the expressions "a good egg" and "bad blood". "A good egg" denotes a reliable and good-natured person and is associated with warmth, friendliness, and positive evaluation in informal communication. In contrast, "bad blood" denotes hostility, animosity, or an old grievance between people and consequently carries strong negative and conflict-related pragmatic force.

Phraseological unit	Meaning	Contextual example	Pragmatic function	Uzbek equivalent
a good egg	An informal expression for a	"He's a good egg, as eggs go, but he's	Positive evaluation, warmth, closeness;	"tilla bola", "zo'r odam"

	reliable, good-natured person.	dreadfully shy.”	emotional and expressive meaning; informal and friendly.	
bad blood	Hostility, animosity, or an old grievance between two or more people.	“There’s always been bad blood in the White family.”	Negative emotion and conflict; dramatic and strongly evaluative.	“orasida adovat bor”, “yuragida gina bor”

3.2. Phraseological units with “good” and “bad”

The analysis of the selected expressions demonstrates that the lexemes “good” and “bad” do not simply preserve their dictionary meanings inside phraseological units. Their pragmatic force emerges through the interaction of the fixed expression, communicative context, and cultural expectations.

Give a good account of yourself. The expression refers to making a positive impression through one’s conduct or performance. In pragmatic terms, it performs an evaluative function by expressing approval of a person’s behavior or performance in a particular situation. The source material associates it with individualism and personal effectiveness in English culture and notes its semantic proximity to “acquit oneself well”. Its metaphorical development is connected with the “account” component and the idea of successfully fulfilling a task.

Have something on good authority. This expression means to know or have information from a reliable source. Pragmatically, it emphasizes the credibility and reliability of information. Its linguocultural interpretation highlights the importance of source authority: the perceived truth of information is often associated with the reputation or knowledge of the person providing it.

Good call / bad call. These expressions are used to approve or criticize a person’s decision or suggestion and are characteristic of informal speech. “Good call!” functions as a concise marker of agreement and approval, while “bad call” expresses the opposite evaluation. The expressions are especially suitable for conversational contexts such as everyday communication, sport, and business.

In someone’s good/bad books. This expression describes a person’s favorable or unfavorable position in someone else’s opinion. It is frequently used in professional or social contexts. The metaphor of “books” as a record of personal evaluation allows the speaker to express approval, disapproval, social reputation, or interpersonal status indirectly.

Of good cheer. This relatively old-fashioned expression means cheerful and optimistic. It is commonly used in spiritual or motivational contexts to encourage emotional strength and optimism. The source material connects “cheer” historically with the face or countenance and interprets “good cheer” as a cultural association between a positive outward appearance and a positive emotional state.

Be (or err) in good company. The expression indicates being in the same situation as respected or notable people. Pragmatically, it can provide psychological reassurance because an individual’s difficulty is presented as shared by others. It also expresses social identification and comparative evaluation.

Put a brave/bold/good face on something. The expression means attempting to make an unpleasant or worrying situation appear less serious than it really is. Pragmatically, it represents a communicative strategy of concealing difficulties and maintaining a positive outward appearance. The metaphorical “brave face” is associated with emotional self-control and the attempt to encourage others.

So far, so good. This expression evaluates a process or project as satisfactory up to the present stage. It can communicate optimism and provisional approval, although the context may

also introduce an element of caution because the positive evaluation is limited to what has happened so far.

Neither fish nor fowl. The expression characterizes something that is difficult to classify or assign to a definite category. Its pragmatic effect is to emphasize uncertainty or lack of clear categorization. It functions informally and metaphorically.

Give as good as you get. The expression means responding to an attack or criticism with comparable force. It is frequently used in competitive or argumentative contexts and reflects the value placed on the ability to defend oneself and respond effectively. The expression establishes a pragmatic relationship of reciprocity and equivalence.

While the going is good. This expression advises a person to act or make a decision while circumstances remain favorable. Pragmatically, it encourages the speaker or listener not to miss an opportunity and to take advantage of favorable conditions.

All to the good. The expression describes a situation or outcome as entirely beneficial or positive. Its pragmatic function is to present an event or result as advantageous and worthy of acceptance.

As good as. In the contexts examined, this expression conveys approximate equivalence or a state very close to a particular result. Pragmatically, it helps the listener interpret an event as practically equivalent to the stated condition, reducing the perceived difference between an actual and an approximate result.

As good as gold. This expression, often applied to children, describes exceptionally well-behaved and exemplary conduct. Its pragmatic force lies in positive moral evaluation, approval, satisfaction, and trust. The cultural symbolism of gold as something valuable, pure, and excellent reinforces the expression's positive evaluative meaning.

3.3. Connotative types of phraseological units

Connotation is an additional semantic component associated with a phraseological unit beyond its basic denotative meaning. It may include emotional, evaluative, stylistic, or cultural associations. According to V. N. Teliya, phraseological units may possess positive, negative, or neutral connotative characteristics.[44] The analysis of expressions containing “good” and “bad” demonstrates all three orientations.

Positive connotation indicates social acceptability and favorable evaluation. Examples include “to have a heart of gold”, “to be in good books”, and “to put in a good word”. Such expressions may convey warmth, respect, approval, kindness, or positive interpersonal attitudes.

Negative connotation communicates criticism or unfavorable social evaluation. Examples include “a bad apple”, referring to a person who has a harmful influence on society; “to be in bad shape”, referring to a poor condition; “to give someone a dirty look”, indicating hostility or disapproval; “to talk behind someone’s back”, referring to speaking negatively about someone in their absence; and “to have a chip on one’s shoulder”, associated with a hostile or resentful attitude.[45]

Neutral connotation is characterized by the absence of marked emotional or evaluative coloring. The source material notes that phraseological units containing “good” or “bad” may acquire relatively neutral meanings in legal, technical, diplomatic, or economic contexts. In such cases, contextual conditions can neutralize otherwise evaluative or emotional components, and the expression primarily conveys objective information.[46; 47]

4. Discussion

The findings indicate that the pragmatic value of phraseological units containing “good” and “bad” cannot be reduced to the positive or negative lexical meaning of the adjectives themselves. The same lexical component may participate in expressions that perform different communicative

functions. “Good” may signal approval, reliability, optimism, credibility, social acceptance, or comparative equivalence, while “bad” may signal conflict, criticism, unfavorable status, or negative social judgment.

A central result of the analysis is the decisive role of context. The conventional meaning of a phraseological unit establishes a semantic basis, but pragmatic interpretation depends on who uses the expression, to whom it is addressed, in what situation it occurs, and what communicative intention is involved. Thus, phraseological units operate simultaneously as semantic and pragmatic structures.

The results also support the view that phraseological units carry linguocultural information. Expressions such as “give a good account of yourself”, “be in good company”, “put a brave face on something”, and “as good as gold” encode culturally recognizable attitudes toward personal performance, social comparison, emotional self-control, and desirable behavior. Consequently, phraseological competence requires not only knowledge of dictionary definitions but also familiarity with the cultural and interactional contexts in which expressions are conventionally used.

The distinction between positive, negative, and neutral connotation further demonstrates that the evaluative potential of “good” and “bad” is context-sensitive. In marked conversational contexts, these lexemes often strengthen emotional and evaluative meaning; in specialized contexts, the same forms may function with reduced stylistic and emotional load. This confirms the importance of contextual analysis in phraseological studies.

5. Conclusion

The study shows that English phraseological units containing the lexemes “good” and “bad” possess substantial pragmatic potential. Their communicative value is realized through a combination of conventional phraseological meaning, context, speaker intention, interpersonal relations, and cultural knowledge. The principal pragmatic functions identified in the source material include emotional-expressive, evaluative, ironic, cultural-identificational, communicative-economic, stylistic, and social-role functions.

The analyzed expressions demonstrate that “good” and “bad” frequently operate as carriers of positive and negative evaluation, but their actual pragmatic interpretation is determined by the broader phraseological construction and its contextual use. Positive expressions can communicate approval, trust, optimism, social acceptance, and moral appreciation, whereas negative expressions can communicate conflict, criticism, disapproval, or unfavorable social judgment. Neutral or less emotionally marked uses are also possible in specialized contexts.

Therefore, the pragmatic study of phraseological units provides a deeper understanding of how English speakers convey not only propositional information but also attitudes, evaluations, interpersonal positions, and culturally conditioned meanings. The analysis confirms that context should be treated as a fundamental component in interpreting the pragmatic and connotative dimensions of English phraseology.

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