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# LEXICAL AND PHRASEOLOGICAL

## PARADIGMS: STRUCTURAL FEATURES AND SEMANTIC RELATIONS IN WORD, WORD COMBINATION, AND IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

## PARADIGMAS LÉXICOS Y FRASEOLÓGICOS: CARACTERÍSTICAS ESTRUCTURALES Y RELACIONES SEMÁNTICAS EN PALABRAS, COMBINACIONES DE PALABRAS Y EXPRESIONES IDIOMÁTICAS

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ABSTRACT

In this research it is investigated the paradigmatic forms and semantic interrelations of words, word combinations, and phraseological units within the framework of modern structural and cognitive linguistics. We focus on how paradigmatic relations—such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and stylistic or functional variation—operate not only among individual lexical items but also between free combinations and fixed idiomatic expressions. By analyzing the structural and semantic mechanisms that connect these linguistic elements, the study reveals how paradigmatic relationships contribute to the organization of the mental lexicon and to the overall semantic coherence of language. Particular attention is paid to the paradigmatic behavior of phraseological units in comparison to words and collocations, with an emphasis on their role in cultural conceptualization and linguistic creativity. We draw on examples from the Azerbaijani language to illustrate how language users access and manipulate paradigmatic alternatives in both literal and figurative speech. The methodological approach includes comparative, descriptive, and functional-semantic analysis. The findings are expected to be relevant for theoretical linguistics, lexicology, translation studies, and intercultural communication.

Keywords: Cognitive linguistics, Structural semantics, Lexical paradigm, Phraseological unit, Azerbaijani language.

RESUMEN

En esta investigación se indagan las formas paradigmáticas y las interrelaciones semánticas de palabras, combinaciones de palabras y unidades fraseológicas en el marco de la lingüística estructural y cognitiva moderna. Se centra en cómo las relaciones paradigmáticas “como la sinonimia, la antonimia, la hiponimia y la variación estilística o funcional” operan no solo entre elementos léxicos individuales, sino también entre combinaciones libres y expresiones idiomáticas fijas. Mediante el análisis de los mecanismos estructurales y semánticos que conectan estos elementos lingüísticos, el estudio revela cómo las relaciones paradigmáticas contribuyen a la organización del léxico mental y a la coherencia semántica general del lenguaje. Se presta especial atención al comportamiento paradigmático de las



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unidades fraseológicas en comparación con las palabras y las colocaciones, con énfasis en su papel en la conceptualización cultural y la creatividad lingüística. Está basado en ejemplos del azerbaiyano para ilustrar cómo los usuarios acceden y manipulan alternativas paradigmáticas tanto en el habla literal como figurada. El enfoque metodológico incluye análisis comparativo, descriptivo y semántico-funcional. Se espera que los hallazgos sean relevantes para la lingüística teórica, la lexicología, los estudios de traducción y la comunicación intercultural.

Palabras clave: Lingüística cognitiva, Semántica estructural, Paradigma léxico, Unidad fraseológica, Lengua azerbaiyana.

## INTRODUCTION

Paradigmatic relations—the vertical links that associate a linguistic unit with the set of items it may substitute—have long been recognized as the backbone of the lexicon (Copot & Bonami, 2023; Sbardolini, 2023; Zee et al., 2021). While the structuralist tradition mapped these relations primarily for single lexical items (Cruse, 1986, p. 27; Lyons, 1977, p. 254), subsequent research in lexical semantics and phraseology has shown that words, free word combinations, and fixed idiomatic expressions all participate in shared paradigmatic networks (Dobrovol'skij & Piirainen, 2021, p. 8). Yet an integrated account that treats these three layers together remains relatively scarce, particularly for non-Indo-European languages such as Azerbaijani.

At the word level, paradigmatic links such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and meronymy structure the mental lexicon and facilitate lexical access. Word combinations—or collocations—extend these relations by bundling habitual co-selections that crystallize semantic preferences (Ismayilova, 2021, p. 14). Phraseological units add a third, idiomatic stratum in which meaning is often non-compositional and culturally loaded (Sharifian, 2017, p. 62). Each stratum both inherits and reshapes the paradigmatic options of the others, creating a dynamic interplay between literal and figurative resources of expression (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 5).

Cognitive-linguistic work on conceptual metaphor has underscored how idioms echo recurrent mappings in everyday reasoning (Lakoff, 1993, p. 206). In Azerbaijani, for instance, the spatial idiom "başına hava gəlmək" ("to have air come to one's head") aligns with a broader cross-linguistic paradigm in which MENTAL INSTABILITY IS UPWARD MOVEMENT, yet it retains culture-specific nuances that resist direct lexical substitution. Such examples reveal that phraseological paradigms are not merely ornamental; they encode culturally salient construals and thus mediate between shared human experiences and local conceptual traditions (Sharifova, 2017, p. 70; Yu, 2011, p. 143).

These intertwined paradigms also pose practical challenges. Translators must gauge whether a target language offers a semantically and stylistically equivalent idiom, whether a literal rendering suffices, or whether a paraphrase is required (Newmark, 1988, p. 115). Misalignment can result in semantic loss, pragmatic incongruity, or cultural misinterpretation. Consequently, a fine-grained description of paradigmatic forms across the three strata is not only a theoretical desideratum but also a prerequisite for reliable interlingual transfer.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to (i) map the structural and semantic parameters that link words, collocations, and phraseological units in Azerbaijani; (ii) demonstrate how these parameters manifest in real-world language use; and (iii) discuss the implications for lexicography and translation studies. Employing a mixed methodological toolkit that combines descriptive-structural analysis with cognitive-semantic interpretation, the article aims to show that paradigmatic organization extends seamlessly from single lexemes to complex idioms—thereby enriching the expressive range of the language while anchoring it in culturally grounded meaning networks. By offering the first comprehensive account of lexical and phraseological paradigms in Azerbaijani, this research aspires to fill a notable gap in the comparative study of Turkic and Indo-European phraseological systems and to contribute a replicable framework for future cross-linguistic investigations.

## DEVELOPMENT

The analysis of lexical and phraseological paradigms in the Azerbaijani language—as well as their broader typological, cognitive, and cultural underpinnings—reveals a rich, multilayered structure of linguistic meaning-making. In particular, the interplay between isolated lexemes, collocational patterns, and idiomatic units highlights the dynamic mechanisms by which speakers select, organize, and express conceptual content. These mechanisms are not purely structural; rather, they are deeply informed by cultural schemas, cognitive metaphors, and discourse-level pragmatics.

At the heart of this paradigmatic system lies the principle of substitutability. Language users constantly navigate choices between different expressions that vary not only in grammatical form but also in stylistic effect, emotional tone, and cultural embeddedness. For example, while a

concept like fear can be articulated through the simple lexeme qorxu, it can also be nuanced through collocational intensifiers (çox qorxmaq) or enriched with metaphor through idiomatic expressions (ürəyi ağzına gəlmək). These options are not random; they belong to organized semantic fields where substitutability follows a gradient—from high (among synonyms) to low (among idioms). The ability to shift across this gradient is a hallmark of linguistic competence.

This layered structure resonates with Cruse's (1986) view that paradigmatic relations are foundational to the lexicon, yet it extends his insights by incorporating phraseological and collocational data. In traditional structuralist models, paradigms were often seen as closed sets of words, classified by formal or semantic contrast. However, recent developments in cognitive linguistic and cultural linguistics have emphasized that idioms, too, form paradigms—albeit ones that are less regular, more context-sensitive, and often opaque to formal analysis. The illustrative table provided by this author supports this broader view by showing how conceptual fields—such as moderation, generosity, or the passage of time—are populated by a triadic structure: a core lexeme, a compositional collocation, and a figurative idiom. This structure not only aids in semantic clarity but also provides stylistic variety and rhetorical depth. Consider the phraseological unit ayağını yorğanına görə uzat. It does not merely warn against extravagance; it evokes a culturally familiar proverb that blends economic caution with visual metaphor, thus conveying more than its literal counterparts ever could.

The cognitive dimension of phraseological paradigms is especially significant. Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) theory of conceptual metaphors, we observe that idiomatic expressions often reflect underlying metaphorical schemas that are both universal and culturally specific. For instance, while TIME IS MONEY appears across many languages, its idiomatic realization differs: English may say "waste time" or "save time," while Azerbaijani invokes vivid temporal compression with göz açıb yumana qədər. Such expressions reflect shared human experiences but are shaped by localized metaphorical mappings and sociocultural conventions.

Importantly, the paradigmatic behavior of idioms diverges markedly from that of lexemes and collocations. Idioms are syntactically fixed, semantically opaque, and often pragmatically loaded. They exhibit restricted substitutability: one cannot simply replace ürəyi ağzına gəlmək with çox qorxmaq without losing the figurative intensity and emotional coloring. Even among idioms, replacement is often constrained to those that share not only semantic value but also stylistic tone, cultural familiarity, and metaphorical resonance.

In translation and cross-linguistic studies, this has serious implications. As Newmark (1988) notes, idiomatic expressions resist literal translation and often demand functional equivalence—a match not just in denotation but in communicative intent. The Azerbaijani idiom daş atmaq çörək kəsilən yerə, when rendered as "don't bite the hand that feeds you," approximates the meaning but diverges in cultural register and moral nuance. Hence, translators must weigh several factors: emotional impact, metaphorical imagery, genre conventions, and audience expectations.

The notion of polysemy further complicates phraseological paradigms. Idioms are frequently multi-functional, with meanings that shift according to context, speaker intention, and discourse domain. As illustrated with expressions like əlin cibində olmaq or suyu bulandırmaq, a single idiom may carry both literal and metaphorical interpretations. This polysemic potential enhances expressive richness but demands that researchers and translators consider idioms as dynamic constructs—open to reinterpretation and cultural reframing.

Another key insight emerging from the analysis is the genre- and register-sensitivity of paradigmatic choices. While a lexeme like qorxu may appear in academic or formal contexts, its idiomatic counterpart ürəyi ağzına gəlmək might be preferred in colloquial or narrative discourse. Similarly, ayağını yorğanına görə uzat may function persuasively in advice-giving genres but would appear stylistically marked in legal or scientific prose. This suggests that paradigmatic selection is always embedded in a communicative ecology—mediated by speaker goals, audience expectations, and genre constraints.

The discussion also highlights the pedagogical implications of a paradigmatic approach to vocabulary and phraseology. For second-language learners, mastering lexical paradigms (e.g., synonym sets, antonyms) is a foundational step. Yet fluency and cultural appropriateness often depend on sensitivity to collocational norms and idiomatic usage. As Littlemore and Low (2006) argue, idiomatic competence is central to communicative effectiveness, and teaching paradigms that include figurative expressions can bridge the gap between grammatical correctness and native-like fluency.

A particularly fruitful direction for future research lies in corpus-based studies of phraseological paradigms. By analyzing authentic language data across genres, speakers, and registers, scholars can identify patterns in idiom frequency, usage shifts, and semantic clustering. Combined with elicitation methods, such research can

map out the cognitive and pragmatic factors that guide phraseological selection. These findings can inform lexicography, language teaching, and machine translation systems by offering more nuanced models of phraseological variation.

The integration of cognitive, cultural, and structural linguistics offers a holistic framework for understanding how paradigms operate in natural language. Lexical, collocational, and idiomatic units are not isolated inventories; they are interconnected tools through which speakers negotiate meaning, construct identity, and express emotion. Their paradigmatic relations reflect not only linguistic structure but also conceptual worldviews and cultural heritage.

Thus, the study of paradigmatic relations across different linguistic levels reveals the depth, flexibility, and cultural grounding of expression in Azerbaijani and, by extension, in human language more broadly. A complete account of language competence must attend not only to word meanings but to the metaphorical, emotional, and stylistic dimensions of phraseological choice. By recognizing and modeling these layered paradigms, linguists, educators, and translators can more fully capture the richness of how meaning is constructed, shared, and transformed.

At the lexical level, paradigmatic links such as synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy offer relatively systematic options for word substitution. These relationships have long served as the foundation for semantic classification and dictionary organization (Cruse, 1986, p. 28). However, this level only reflects the most surface layer of expressive variability. When we move toward word combinations and idiomatic expressions, paradigmatic relations become more context-sensitive, stylistically loaded, and culturally embedded.

Word combinations—particularly collocations—serve as an intermediate paradigm. They reflect habitual co-occurrence patterns that are partially compositional, allowing speakers to construct meaning through predictable yet expressive combinations. This level plays a bridging role between individual words and fixed idioms, facilitating the transition from denotative to connotative meaning (Ismayilova, 2021, p. 49). Phraseological units, in turn, operate within their own specialized paradigms. These units are not freely interchangeable with individual words or collocations, as their meanings are often figurative, culturally saturated, and emotionally charged (Sharifian, 2017, p. 104). Furthermore, they frequently form conceptual clusters based on shared metaphorical structures—such as spatial orientation, bodily experience, or social norms—that govern their usage and reception.

Moreover, polysemy in phraseological units significantly impacts their paradigmatic behavior. A single idiom may carry multiple metaphorical or pragmatic interpretations depending on discourse context, speaker intent, or cultural background (Lakoff, 1993, p. 228). This polysemy not only complicates the construction of stable idiomatic paradigms but also poses substantial challenges for cross-linguistic equivalence in translation. In the realm of translation and intercultural communication, the absence of one-to-one equivalence across languages highlights the need for more nuanced and functional approaches. Translators must evaluate not only the surface meaning of an idiom but also its pragmatic effect, stylistic register, emotional tone, and cultural resonance (Newmark, 1988, p. 125). As shown in our examples, idioms that share a conceptual basis across languages may diverge in form and usage, requiring creative and culturally informed strategies for rendering.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this study was conducted a multi-layered analysis of paradigmatic structures in the Azerbaijani language, examining the interrelations between single lexical units, collocational patterns, and idiomatic phraseological expressions. The findings reveal that these strata, though structurally distinct, operate as an interconnected and dynamic network of paradigmatic relations that underpin meaning construction, communicative variation, and stylistic choice. From a theoretical standpoint, we advocate for an integrated model of paradigmatic organization that moves beyond the traditional word-centered approach to encompass complex multi-word structures, demonstrating that such relations extend across linguistic levels and are shaped by both cognitive frameworks and sociocultural contexts. On the other hand, from an applied perspective, the implications are manifold:

- For lexicographers, there is a need to represent idioms not just as fixed entries but as elements in flexible semantic networks.
- For language educators, teaching materials should highlight idiomatic paradigms and their metaphorical underpinnings to facilitate deeper learner engagement.
- For translation professionals, understanding idiomatic variation as part of paradigmatic structure can improve fidelity and creativity in interlingual transfer.

To sum up, phraseological paradigms are not marginal deviations from the lexicon but are central to the expressive and conceptual power of language. Their study enhances our understanding of how meaning is organized, transmitted, and transformed across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The Azerbaijani case, as examined here,

provides a valuable lens for examining these dynamics and opens new paths for comparative phraseological research, corpus-based studies, and cognitive linguistic analysis across the Turkic and world languages.

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