



Spanish Phraseological Expressions as a Reflection of National Worldview and Communicative Identity

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Abstract:

This article explores the role of phraseological expressions in the Spanish language as carriers of national and cultural identity. Through the lens of linguistic relativity and cultural linguistics, it investigates how idioms, collocations, and proverbs reflect the historical experiences, cognitive patterns, and value systems of Spanish-speaking societies. Particular attention is given to the metaphorical structure, emotional expressiveness, and pragmatic functions of phraseological units. The study also examines the challenges involved in interpreting and teaching idioms across cultural boundaries. By analyzing authentic phraseological data from literature, media, and everyday speech, the article emphasizes the significance of phraseology in forming communicative competence and understanding the Spanish worldview.

Keywords:

Spanish language, phraseology, idioms, national worldview, cultural identity, metaphor, pragmatics, Spanish proverbs, linguistic relativity, teaching Spanish

Spanish phraseological expressions offer a unique perspective on the intersection between language and culture. They serve as a linguistic mirror reflecting the collective memory, emotions, values, and social behavior of Spanish-speaking communities. These fixed or semi-fixed expressions—idioms, proverbs, and collocations—are more than stylistic ornaments; they encode centuries of historical development, cultural experience, and cognitive perception. Understanding and analyzing them is essential to grasp the essence of Spanish linguistic and cultural identity.

The expression of thoughts and feelings through idioms such as *poner los pies en la tierra* (to come back to reality), *estar como una cabra* (to act crazy), or *ver las estrellas* (to feel intense pain) demonstrates how Spanish conceptualizes abstract realities through concrete and often vivid imagery. Such expressions cannot be understood solely through direct translation or grammatical rules. Their meanings are deeply metaphorical and culturally specific, shaped by traditional ways of thinking and perceiving the world.



The strong metaphorical component of Spanish phraseology is consistent with the cognitive approach to language, particularly conceptual metaphor theory. Speakers often draw on domains such as the body, space, color, and animals to represent psychological or emotional states. For example, *tener la sartén por el mango* (to hold the frying pan by the handle) means to have control, and *irse por las ramas* (to go off on a tangent) refers to avoiding the main point. These metaphors reflect not only creative thought but also conventionalized knowledge embedded in the language.

Cultural values such as family, honor, religion, patience, and perseverance frequently surface in Spanish phraseology. Expressions like *más vale malo conocido que bueno por conocer* (better the devil you know than the devil you don't) reveal a culturally rooted skepticism toward change. Meanwhile, idioms such as *cría cuervos y te sacarán los ojos* (raise crows and they will peck your eyes out) reflect social observations and intergenerational commentary. Such expressions, often derived from oral tradition, encapsulate moral or practical lessons passed from generation to generation.

Moreover, Spanish phraseology shows strong regional variation. While many expressions are understood throughout the Spanish-speaking world, others have a local or national coloring. For instance, in Spain, one might say *estar en el quinto pino* (to be very far away), while in Latin America, *estar en la luna de Valencia* is similarly used, but its understanding may vary depending on the listener's background. These variations contribute to the richness and dynamism of Spanish as a global language.

Another notable feature of Spanish phraseology is its emotional expressiveness. Spanish idioms frequently serve to intensify the emotional tone of discourse, either positively or negatively. For example, *estar más feliz que una perdiz* (to be as happy as a partridge) conveys joy, whereas *estar con el alma en un hilo* (to be with the soul hanging by a thread) expresses anxiety. These expressions allow speakers to communicate affective states in a nuanced and culturally resonant manner.

The use of phraseological expressions in literature and media enhances their visibility and reinforces their cultural function. Writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, and Mario Vargas Llosa make frequent use of idiomatic language to depict characters, settings, and social realities. The inclusion of idioms in literature adds authenticity to dialogue and deepens the reader's immersion in the cultural context of the narrative.

In modern times, digital communication and social media have influenced the evolution of phraseological usage. Memes, hashtags, and online dialogues have accelerated the circulation of idioms and even created new ones. Internet users creatively blend traditional idioms with current slang or pop culture references, thus expanding the phraseological repertoire. This process keeps the language alive and responsive to social change.

Despite their richness, phraseological expressions pose difficulties for learners of Spanish as a foreign language. Idioms are often non-transparent, highly context-dependent, and culturally loaded. Learners may understand the individual words but fail to grasp the figurative meaning or appropriate usage. Therefore, teaching phraseology requires specific pedagogical strategies that go beyond rote memorization.

One effective approach is contextualized learning, where idioms are presented within dialogues, narratives, or audiovisual materials that show how they are used in real-life situations. Another method is contrastive analysis, which compares idioms in the learners' native language and Spanish, highlighting both similarities and differences in metaphorical thinking. Visual imagery, storytelling, and cultural background explanations can also enhance retention and understanding.

Moreover, corpora and phraseological dictionaries can be useful tools for exploring the frequency and distribution of idioms in authentic texts. These resources allow learners and researchers to study how expressions function in different registers—formal or informal, oral or written, regional or national. Exposure to a wide variety of contexts helps learners build pragmatic competence and avoid miscommunication.

The translation of Spanish phraseological units into other languages remains one of the most challenging aspects of cross-cultural communication. Literal translation often results in loss of meaning, humor, or cultural reference. For instance, *buscarle la quinta pata al gato* (to look for the cat's fifth paw) makes little sense in English unless translated as “to complicate things unnecessarily.” Translators must carefully evaluate whether to use an equivalent idiom in the target language, explain the meaning, or adapt the expression to the cultural context of the audience.

Phraseology also plays an important role in sociolinguistic interaction. Idioms can signal group membership, social status, or familiarity among speakers. The choice of expressions may differ depending on age, education, gender, or social setting. In informal conversation, idioms serve as markers of spontaneity and



solidarity, while in formal writing, they may be used to evoke tradition or authority. Being able to interpret and use phraseological expressions appropriately contributes significantly to social integration and intercultural understanding.

The psychological dimension of phraseology should not be overlooked. Idioms can shape how speakers conceptualize reality and respond to events. Phrases such as *no hay mal que por bien no venga* (every cloud has a silver lining) encourage resilience, while others like *el que la hace, la paga* (what goes around comes around) emphasize justice or retribution. These expressions influence thought patterns and behavior, subtly reinforcing cultural attitudes and worldviews.

In sum, Spanish phraseology is a dynamic and culturally significant area of study that bridges language, thought, and society. It provides insight into the ways in which speakers conceptualize experience, structure meaning, and express identity. By examining idioms, proverbs, and collocations, we can better understand how the Spanish language operates not only as a system of communication but also as a repository of collective knowledge and emotion.

The study of Spanish phraseology has implications not only for linguistics and language teaching, but also for intercultural communication, translation studies, and cognitive science. It calls for an interdisciplinary approach that takes into account linguistic structure, cultural background, and communicative function. As globalization continues to bring languages and cultures into closer contact, the ability to interpret and use phraseological language becomes an essential component of communicative competence.

Whether preserved in literature, transformed by social media, or passed down through generations in everyday speech, phraseological expressions remain central to the life of the Spanish language. They embody the spirit, humor, and wisdom of its speakers and provide a vivid lens through which to view the world they inhabit.

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