EXPRESSIVENESS AND EVALUATIVE SEMANTICS IN PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS WITH A HYPERBOLE COMPONENT

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Abstract. This study examines expressiveness and evaluative semantics in English phraseological units containing a hyperbolic component. It explores how exaggeration intensifies meaning, conveys emotions, and expresses positive or negative attitudes. Using qualitative semantic and contextual analysis, the study considers selected expressions to illustrate the relationship between hyperbolic intensity and evaluative meaning. The analysis highlights that expressive force and evaluation are closely related but distinct, and that contextual factors play an important role in interpreting hyperbolic phraseological units.

Keywords: phraseological units, hyperbole, expressiveness, evaluative semantics, semantic intensification, contextual interpretation.

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Introduction. Phraseological units are an essential component of the English lexicon, as they enable speakers to express meanings, emotions, and attitudes through conventional combinations of words. Their semantic complexity often arises from the interaction between literal meaning, figurative interpretation, and culturally established associations. Among the linguistic devices that contribute to the expressive potential of phraseology, hyperbole occupies a significant position because it allows speakers to exaggerate a quality, quantity, degree, or situation in order to strengthen the communicative impact of an utterance.

Hyperbole has traditionally been examined as a rhetorical figure; however, its role in everyday communication extends beyond stylistic ornamentation. Carston and Wearing [1] argue that hyperbole involves the exaggeration of a relevant scalar property and may convey an evaluative attitude toward a particular state of affairs. Their account highlights the relationship between semantic intensification and evaluation, providing a useful theoretical foundation for the analysis of hyperbolic phraseological units. Similarly, McCarthy and Carter [2], drawing on a large corpus of everyday English conversation, demonstrate the importance of interactional context in interpreting hyperbolic expressions. Their research indicates that the communicative function of exaggeration cannot be adequately explained without considering how speakers and listeners interpret expressions in particular situations.

When hyperbole occurs within a phraseological unit, its expressive function may be closely connected with the conventional meaning of the expression. Such units can intensify emotional states, emphasize personal judgments, and communicate approval, disapproval, admiration, frustration, or other attitudes. Nevertheless, expressive intensity and evaluative meaning should not be treated as

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identical phenomena. An expression may communicate a high degree of emotional intensity without necessarily expressing a positive or negative judgment. Its evaluative orientation may depend on the phraseological meaning, the communicative purpose of the speaker, and the wider linguistic context. Recent research on figurative language has continued to investigate the interaction between hyperbole, scalar meaning, and metaphorical interpretation. For example, the 2026 study When scalarity meets cross-domain mapping: A corpus-based lexical-conceptual analysis of metaphorical hyperbole examines how scalar exaggeration interacts with conceptual mapping and evaluative meaning [3]. This line of research provides a relevant background for examining hyperbole not merely as an isolated rhetorical device but as a semantic and pragmatic resource. However, the specific relationship between hyperbolic phraseological structure, expressive intensity, and evaluative orientation requires careful analysis at the level of individual expressions and their contexts.

The present study aims to investigate the expressive and evaluative functions of English phraseological units containing a hyperbolic component. It focuses on three interconnected aspects: the mechanisms through which exaggeration intensifies phraseological meaning, the positive or negative evaluations that such expressions may communicate, and the influence of context on their interpretation. The study adopts a qualitative linguistic approach involving semantic analysis and contextual interpretation of selected English expressions. By examining these dimensions together, the research seeks to clarify how hyperbole contributes to the expressive resources of English phraseology and how evaluative meaning operates within conventional figurative expressions.

Theoretical Background. Phraseological units are relatively stable word combinations whose meanings often extend beyond the literal meanings of their individual components. They may convey not only conceptual information but also emotional attitudes and evaluative judgments. Yeghiazarian [3] highlights the role of emotive and evaluative meaning in phraseology, while Tomenchuk [4] examines the relationship between evaluation, expressiveness, and emotionality in English phraseological units. These perspectives provide a theoretical basis for investigating how conventional expressions communicate subjective attitudes. Hyperbole involves deliberate exaggeration used to intensify a quality, quantity, emotion, or situation. Carston and Wearing [1] demonstrate that hyperbole can combine scalar exaggeration with evaluative meaning. In phraseological expressions such as cost an arm and a leg and wait an eternity, exaggeration emphasizes excessive expense or perceived duration rather than literal meaning. McCarthy and Carter [2] also emphasize the importance of conversational context in interpreting hyperbole. Therefore, hyperbolic phraseological units should be examined in relation to both their conventional meanings and their communicative functions. Expressiveness refers to the capacity of a linguistic unit to make communication more vivid, emphatic, or emotionally forceful, whereas evaluative semantics concerns the attitudes and judgments conveyed by an expression. Although closely related, these dimensions are not identical. For example, scared to death intensifies the description of fear, while move mountains may express determination or admiration. Their precise interpretation depends on conventional meaning and context. Accordingly, this study examines hyperbolic phraseological units through three dimensions: semantic intensification, expressive force, and evaluative orientation, classified as positive, negative, or context-dependent.

3. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of English phraseological units containing a hyperbolic component demonstrates that exaggeration can perform several interconnected functions, including semantic intensification,

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emotional expression, and the communication of evaluative meaning. As Carston and Wearing [1] explain, hyperbole involves the exaggeration of a relevant property and may communicate an evaluation of a particular state of affairs. At the same time, McCarthy and Carter [2] emphasize that contextual interpretation is essential for understanding the communicative functions of hyperbolic expressions.

The following examples illustrate how these functions may interact.

Table 1. Expressive and evaluative characteristics of selected English hyperbolic expressions

Phraseological expression	Hyperbolic meaning	Expressive function	Evaluative orientation
Scared to death	Extremely frightened	Intensifies fear	Negative emotional state
Cost an arm and a leg	Extremely expensive	Emphasizes excessive cost	Usually negative
Wait an eternity	Wait for an extremely long time	Expresses impatience or frustration	Context-dependent
Move mountains	Overcome seemingly enormous obstacles	Emphasizes determination or ability	Often positive

The examples reveal that hyperbolic intensification does not produce an identical evaluative effect in every expression. In scared to death, the exaggeration emphasizes the intensity of fear, while in cost an arm and a leg, it highlights the perceived excessive cost of something. In both cases, the expressions convey meanings that go beyond literal interpretation, but their semantic focus differs.

The expression wait an eternity illustrates the importance of context. It may communicate frustration when a person describes an excessively long wait, but it can also be used humorously in an informal conversation. Similarly, move mountains may express admiration for determination or confidence in overcoming difficulties. These examples suggest that the evaluative orientation of a hyperbolic expression cannot always be established independently of its communicative context.

A further distinction can be made between expressive intensity and evaluative meaning. Expressive intensity concerns the degree to which an expression emphasizes a particular quality or emotional state, whereas evaluative meaning concerns the attitude conveyed toward that quality or situation. Although the two dimensions frequently interact, they are not interchangeable. An expression can be highly emphatic without necessarily communicating approval or disapproval.

The analysis supports a three-dimensional approach to hyperbolic phraseology: the identification of exaggeration, the examination of expressive force, and the interpretation of evaluative orientation. These dimensions provide a practical framework for describing how hyperbolic phraseological units contribute to the communicative resources of English. Since the present examples are illustrative rather than corpus-derived, the findings should be understood as qualitative observations rather than statistical generalizations about English phraseology.

Conclusion. The study has examined the relationship between expressiveness and evaluative semantics in English phraseological units containing a hyperbolic component. The analysis indicates that hyperbole serves not only as a means of semantic intensification but also as a resource for expressing emotions and communicating subjective attitudes. By exaggerating a particular quality, condition, or situation, hyperbolic phraseological units can increase expressive force and make the

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speaker's intended meaning more prominent. The examples further demonstrate that expressive intensity and evaluative orientation are closely related but distinct semantic dimensions. While some expressions tend to convey negative emotional states or unfavorable judgments, others may communicate determination, admiration, or a positive attitude. In certain cases, their interpretation depends substantially on the communicative context.

The study therefore highlights the importance of examining hyperbolic phraseological units through their conventional meanings, expressive functions, and evaluative characteristics. This approach contributes to a more systematic understanding of the interaction between figurative meaning and subjective evaluation in English phraseology. Further research based on a larger corpus of naturally occurring language could provide additional evidence concerning the frequency, contextual variation, and distribution of these functions.

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