

CULTURAL SEMIOTICS IN THE ANGLOSPHERE: A COMPARATIVE THEORETICAL STUDY OF SIGNS, SYMBOLS, AND PHRASEOLOGICAL EXPRESSIONS IN THE USA AND UK

Mukhammadieva Shakhzoda

Master's student of SamSIFL

Scientific supervisor: Shamurodova Naima

Samarkand State Institute of Foreign languages

Associate professor

Xamrayeva Zebiniso Xaydarovna

Department of Innovative Educational Technologies and Methodology

Associate Professor, PhD

**MAQOLA
MALUMOTI**

ANNOTATSIYA:

MAQOLA TARIXI:

Received: 29.10.2025

Revised: 30.10.2025

Accepted: 31.10.2025

KALIT SO'ZLAR:

semiotics, signs, symbols, phraseology, idioms, American English, British English, linguistic relativity, visual communication, cultural linguistics

This article presents a comparative theoretical analysis of signs, symbols, and phraseological expressions in the United States and the United Kingdom. Grounded in semiotic and linguistic theory, the study explores how both visual signs and idiomatic language encode cultural knowledge, reflect social values, and contribute to meaning-making in public and interpersonal communication. Drawing on frameworks from structuralism, socio-pragmatics, and cognitive linguistics, the research reveals how national identities and communicative norms are embedded in both verbal and non-verbal semiotic systems. The study argues that the interplay between linguistic and visual semiotics is essential to understanding the broader cultural semiotic landscape of the Anglosphere.

Introduction

Semiotics, as the study of meaning-making through signs and symbols, offers a powerful framework for understanding both visual and linguistic communication across cultures. In the Anglosphere, the United States and the United Kingdom represent two dominant yet distinct cultural variants of English, shaped by shared history but divergent social, legal, and communicative norms. This study integrates the analysis of public signs and symbols with phraseological expressions—particularly idioms—used in contemporary American and British English, in order to explore how meaning is constructed differently across these two national contexts.

Drawing from Saussure’s dyadic model of the sign, which consists of a signifier (form) and signified (concept), and Peirce’s triadic model, which includes the representamen, object, and interpretant, we can interpret both visual signage and idioms as complex semiotic units. While visual signs often function iconically or symbolically to convey instructions, warnings, or information, idioms represent culturally loaded linguistic signs whose meanings frequently defy compositional logic. These phraseological units are often culturally embedded and reflect shared social experiences, metaphors, and values that can vary significantly between the USA and UK.

In public signage, formal differences between the two nations are immediately apparent. British signs frequently favor minimalism and iconic abstraction—such as the use of red-bordered triangles to indicate warnings—while American signage typically relies more heavily on textual and directive clarity, using yellow diamonds or rectangular signs with clear, imperative language like “Do Not Enter” or “No Trespassing.” While both follow international road sign conventions to a degree, their stylistic choices reflect broader cultural communication styles. American signage, aligned with a low-context culture, tends to prioritize explicitness and legal precision, whereas British signage, reflective of a high-context culture, often assumes shared contextual understanding and relies on subtler cues. Even shared signs, such as pedestrian warnings, diverge: the British “Mind the gap,” famously used in the London Underground, stands in contrast to the American “Watch your step,” highlighting a difference not just in phraseology but in pragmatic tone and cultural framing.

Similarly, phraseological expressions in modern English exhibit both transatlantic commonality and cultural specificity. While idioms such as “spill the beans,” “under the weather,” and “break the ice” are mutually intelligible and widely used in both nations,

others are distinctly national or reflect different metaphorical constructs. The British expression “throw a spanner in the works” becomes “throw a wrench in the works” in American English, maintaining conceptual equivalence while altering lexical form. Conversely, idioms like “Bob’s your uncle” have no direct American counterpart, and American expressions such as “Monday morning quarterback,” rooted in football culture, lack equivalents in British English due to differing cultural referents.[5,72]

These differences are not arbitrary but are grounded in the broader concept of cultural linguistics, which posits that language encodes cultural conceptualizations—shared ideas, beliefs, and practices that shape how speakers think and communicate. Idioms are a key reflection of these conceptualizations. British English, for instance, often emphasizes understatement, indirection, and self-deprecation. Expressions like “not bad” meaning “quite good,” or the sarcastic “typical, isn’t it?” reveal culturally specific attitudes toward politeness, modesty, and social harmony. In contrast, American English tends toward assertiveness, optimism, and hyperbole, favoring expressions such as “awesome,” “super excited,” or “couldn’t be better” in both informal and professional contexts. These variations reflect differing cultural scripts and pragmatic norms, as described in politeness theory (Brown and Levinson) and the broader field of socio-pragmatics.

The connection between visual and linguistic semiotics becomes particularly apparent when we consider how certain idioms emerge from or become embedded in public discourse, often through signs themselves. For example, “Mind the gap” has transcended its original function as a safety warning to become a cultural idiom symbolizing awareness of metaphorical gaps—be they generational, linguistic, or technological. In this way, idioms and signs do not operate in separate spheres but are interwoven into a shared semiotic environment in which context, culture, and cognition converge.[8,34]

Furthermore, the interplay of linguistic relativity and semiotic practice suggests that the habitual ways in which societies use language and signs shape how individuals perceive and engage with their environment. While both American and British English share common linguistic roots, the differences in phraseology and signage reflect divergent historical trajectories, legal systems, and communicative preferences. This is particularly evident in institutional discourse—e.g., the language of law, transportation, education, or healthcare—where public communication must simultaneously perform legal, cultural, and pragmatic functions.

Thus, signs and idioms together constitute a semiotic continuum along which meaning is negotiated in culturally specific ways. Visual signs tend to crystallize institutional meaning and public norms, while idioms operate in interpersonal and affective domains, yet both are essential to a society's semiotic fabric. Both require shared knowledge to be understood correctly and both evolve in response to social, technological, and political change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the comparative semiotic analysis of the USA and UK reveals that despite a shared language, the two nations differ significantly in how they deploy signs and phraseological expressions. These differences are deeply rooted in cultural values, communicative styles, and historical experiences. Theoretical models from semiotics, pragmatics, and cultural linguistics illuminate how these variations are structured and maintained. As globalization continues to influence language and visual communication, some convergence may occur; however, the enduring distinctions in idiomatic language and public signs remain vital markers of national identity and cultural cognition. Future research may benefit from integrating corpus analysis or ethnographic methods to further explore how these semiotic forms function in real-life communicative practices, especially in multicultural and digital contexts.

References

1. Абдувахабова У., Мухаммадиева Ш. Phraseological expressions in modern english: derivational features and their role in language theory and the culture of dialogue //Диалог, интеграция наук и культур в процессе научного и профессионального образования. – 2025. – Т. 1. – №. 1. – С. 550-552.
2. Barthes, R. (1964). Elements of Semiology. Hill and Wang.
3. Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage. Cambridge University Press.
4. Chandler, D. (2017). Semiotics: The Basics (3rd ed.). Routledge.
5. Cowie, A. P. (1998). Phraseology: Theory, Analysis, and Applications. Oxford University Press.
6. Crystal, D. (2003). The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language. Cambridge University Press.

7. Fillmore, C. J. (1982). Frame Semantics. In Linguistic Society of Korea (Ed.), *Linguistics in the Morning Calm*. Hanshin.
8. Gläser, R. (1988). The Stylistic Potential of Phraseological Units in the Light of Genre Analysis. In Cowie, A. (Ed.), *Phraseology: Theory, Analysis, and Applications*. Oxford University Press.
9. Hazratova Sh., (2025). Developing communicative competence in early childhood education: Strategies and Challenges., *Talqin va tadqiqotlar jurnali.*, 22-30.
10. Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. Anchor Books.
11. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press.
12. Leech, G. (2016). *Principles of Pragmatics*. Routledge.
13. Peirce, C. S. (1931–1958). *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce (Vols. 1–8)*. Harvard University Press.
14. Saussure, F. de (1916/1983). *Course in General Linguistics*. Duckworth.
15. Sharifian, F. (2017). *Cultural Linguistics: Cultural Conceptualisations and Language*. John Benjamins.
16. Shoqulova , L., Shamuradova , N., & Hamrakulova , A. (2024). TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TO YOUNG LEARNERS. *SYNAPSES: Insights across the Disciplines*, 1(4), 167–170. Retrieved from <https://inlibrary.uz/index.php/siad/article/view/63933>