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CONCEPT OF LACUNARITY: NATURE AND CLASSIFICATION OF PHRASEOLOGICAL LACUNAS

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Abstract: Lacunarity is a fundamental concept in modern linguistics that refers to the gaps or absences of linguistic and cultural equivalents between languages. This article explores the phenomenon of “phraseological lacunas”— the lack of direct equivalents for idioms, proverbs, sayings, and other fixed expressions in contrastive linguistics. The paper defines the nature of phraseological lacunas, highlighting their strong connection to culture, history, worldview, and national mentality. It explains why these gaps occur, including cultural differences, divergent historical development, and variations in metaphorical thinking. Special attention is given to the “classification of phraseological lacunas”. The article presents a clear system based on several criteria: degree of equivalence (absolute vs. partial), nature of the gap (cultural, conceptual, linguistic), translation difficulty, and origin (ethno-specific, historical, metaphoric). Through practical examples from English, Russian, Uzbek, and other languages, the study demonstrates how phraseological lacunas manifest in real communication. The article also discusses effective strategies for overcoming these gaps in translation and language teaching. Understanding phraseological lacunas plays a vital role in improving translation quality, enhancing intercultural communication, and deepening cross-cultural awareness in an increasingly globalized world.

Keywords: Lacunarity, Phraseological Lacunas, Linguistic Gaps, Idioms, Contrastive Linguistics, Intercultural Communication, Translation Strategies.

Introduction

In our increasingly interconnected world, effective communication between people of different cultures and languages has become more important than ever. However, even with advanced translation tools and global education, many misunderstandings still arise. One of the main reasons for these difficulties lies in “lacunarity” — the phenomenon of “gaps” or missing equivalents between languages. “Lacunarity” (from Latin “lacuna” – gap, empty space) is a key concept in linguistics that describes the absence of a word, expression, or concept in one language that exists in another. While lacunas can appear at different levels (lexical, grammatical, or semantic), “phraseological lacunas” are particularly complex and interesting. They occur when fixed expressions — such as idioms, proverbs, sayings, and collocations — in one language have no direct equivalent in another. Phraseological units are not just combinations of words; they are stable linguistic blocks deeply rooted in a nation’s history, culture, traditions, and way of thinking. Because



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of this cultural embedding, many idioms cannot be translated literally without losing their meaning, emotional tone, or imagery. This article aims to provide a clear and comprehensive overview of the concept of lacunarity with a special focus on “phraseological lacunas”. It examines their nature, explains the main reasons for their appearance, and presents a systematic classification based on different criteria. The paper also discusses practical examples from English, Russian, Uzbek, and other languages to illustrate how these gaps manifest in real-life communication. Understanding phraseological lacunas is essential not only for professional translators but also for language learners, teachers, linguists, and anyone involved in intercultural dialogue. By studying these “missing pieces,” we gain deeper insight into how languages reflect unique worldviews and cultural identities.

The Nature of Phraseological Lacunas

Phraseological lacunas represent one of the most challenging types of linguistic gaps. A “phraseological lacuna” occurs when a fixed expression (idiom, proverb, saying, or stable collocation) in one language has no equivalent in another language. Phraseological units are special linguistic formations. They are:

- Stable — used as ready-made blocks
- Reproducible — repeated in the same form
- Non-compositional — their meaning cannot be guessed from the individual words
- Culturally loaded — deeply connected to the history, values, and worldview of a nation

The nature of phraseological lacunas lies in their “asymmetry” between languages. While some concepts can be expressed easily, others are rich and nuanced in one culture but almost absent in another. These gaps are not simple absences — they reflect different ways societies perceive and interpret reality. Phraseological lacunas often carry emotional, stylistic, or evaluative meanings that are difficult to transfer. They function as cultural markers that reveal how people think, feel, and relate to the world around them.

Causes of Phraseological Lacunas

Phraseological lacunas appear due to several interconnected reasons:

- Cultural Differences: Every culture has unique traditions, customs, climate, food, and social practices. For example, expressions related to maritime life in English may not have equivalents in landlocked cultures like Uzbekistan.
- Divergent Historical Development: Languages evolve differently. Historical events, literature, religion, and folklore shape phraseology in unique ways. An idiom born from a specific historical event in one country often lacks a parallel elsewhere.
- Different Worldviews and Metaphorical Systems: Cultures use different source domains for metaphors. English often uses sports or business metaphors, while other cultures may draw from nature, family relations, or religious concepts.
- Linguistic Structure: Differences in grammar, syntax, and word-formation create structural gaps. Analytic languages (like English) and synthetic languages (like Russian or Uzbek) build expressions differently.



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➤ National Mentality and Values: Concepts like “авось” in Russian (optimistic fatalism) or traditional hospitality expressions in Uzbek culture reflect specific national psychology that may not exist in the same form in other languages.

Examples of Phraseological Lacunas Related to National Mentality and Values

Culture	Phraseological Unit	Meaning	Why it Creates a Lacuna
Russian	Авось (Avos')	Optimistic fatalism; hope that things will work out without planning	No single equivalent in English or most languages captures this cultural attitude of hopeful carelessness.
Uzbek	Mehmon otangdan ulug'	The guest is greater than your father (extreme respect for guests)	Reflects very strong hospitality values; Western expressions are much weaker in comparison.
English / American	/ Pull yourself up by your bootstraps	Succeed through your own hard work and determination	Strongly reflects individualism and self-reliance, which may seem strange in collectivist cultures.
Japanese	Gaman (我慢する)	Patiently enduring hardship without complaining	Embodies Japanese values of resilience, dignity, and group harmony; lacks direct equivalent elsewhere.

Classification of Phraseological Lacunas

Phraseological lacunas can be classified using several criteria for better understanding:

№	Classification Criterion	Type	Description
1	By Degree of Equivalence	Absolute Lacunas	Complete absence of any equivalent expression in the target language.
		Partial (Relative) Lacunas	Similar expressions exist, but they differ in imagery, connotation, emotional tone, or usage.
2	By Nature of the Gap	Cultural Lacunas	Caused by specific cultural realia (unique objects, traditions, or practices).
		Conceptual Lacunas	The underlying idea or cognitive script is missing or significantly different in the other culture.
		Linguistic Lacunas	Gaps resulting from structural, grammatical, or syntactic differences between languages.
3	By Origin	Ethno-specific Lacunas	Related to national character, mentality, and traditional values.
		Historical Lacunas	Based on past events, outdated customs, or historical references.
		Metaphoric Lacunas	Differences in metaphorical imagery (e.g., animals, colors, food, nature, sports, etc.).



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№	Classification Criterion	Type	Description
4	By Translation Complexity	Easily Compensated	Can be translated with minor adjustments or functional equivalents.
		Difficult Lacunas	Require detailed explanation, footnotes, cultural adaptation, or compensation.

This classification helps linguists, translators, and language learners identify the type of phraseological lacuna and select the most appropriate translation or communication strategy.

Effective Strategies for Overcoming Phraseological Lacunas

Overcoming phraseological lacunas requires creativity and cultural sensitivity. Here are the most effective strategies:

Descriptive Translation: Explaining the meaning in plain words (e.g., instead of translating an idiom literally, describe what it means).

✓ Functional Equivalence: Finding an idiom in the target language that produces a similar effect, even if the image is different.

✓ Calquing (Loan Translation): Literal word-for-word translation to create a new expression in the target language.

✓ Compensation: Moving the lost meaning to another part of the text to maintain the overall impact.

✓ Footnotes and Glossaries: Providing explanations for culturally important expressions, especially in literary and academic translations.

✓ Cultural Adaptation: Replacing the source idiom with one that fits the target culture while keeping the intended message.

✓ Omission: Rarely used when the expression adds little value and literal translation would confuse the reader.

In cross-cultural communication, it is important to raise awareness of these gaps. Language learners and professionals should study phraseology comparatively to develop better intercultural competence.

Conclusion

The concept of lacunarity occupies a central place in modern linguistics, particularly in contrastive linguistics, translation studies, and intercultural communication. Phraseological lacunas, as one of their most vivid manifestations, reveal the deep-rooted cultural and cognitive differences between languages. This article has examined the “nature” of phraseological lacunas as stable, culturally loaded expressions that often lack direct equivalents due to their non-compositional meaning and strong national coloring. It has analyzed the main “causes” — cultural specificity, historical development, divergent worldviews, and linguistic structures — that give rise to these gaps.

Furthermore, the paper presented a systematic classification” of phraseological lacunas based on degree of equivalence, nature of the gap, origin, and translation complexity. Understanding and overcoming phraseological lacunas is not merely a technical task for translators. It is a pathway to genuine intercultural understanding. In

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today's globalized world, where communication between cultures occurs daily, awareness of these linguistic and cultural gaps helps prevent misunderstandings and fosters mutual respect.

Effective strategies such as functional equivalence, descriptive translation, compensation, and cultural adaptation allow us to bridge these gaps successfully. However, the complete elimination of lacunas is neither possible nor desirable, as they reflect the beautiful diversity of human thought and experience. Ultimately, studying phraseological lacunas reminds us that language is much more than a tool for exchanging information — it is a mirror of culture, mentality, and identity. By recognizing and respectfully addressing these “empty spaces” between languages, we move closer to more meaningful, accurate, and harmonious cross-cultural dialogue. Mastering the concept of lacunarity equips language professionals, educators, and global citizens with the sensitivity and skills necessary to navigate our multilingual and multicultural reality.

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