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## Phraseological Units with Somatic Components: Threats and Benefits

(On the Material of English and Georgian Languages)

The paper aims to study the phraseological units with somatic components in English and Georgian languages. With reference to both languages, such units have been analyzed by numerous scholars from the linguistic viewpoint. The novelty of the given paper is that it approaches such units with regard to their psychological impact, which, in the long run, either affects or benefits the human health system.

It is well known that phraseological units with somatic components are untranslatable expressions containing the names of various parts of the human body as well as the elements of the respiratory, neural and gastro-intestinal systems. Such phraseological units are abundantly found in every language, including the two languages under analysis. M. Iunescu notes that *“anatomical lexemes are of significant importance in any culture, because they are used to describe associated semantic and metaphoric relationships”* (Iunescu 2005: 40). According to Dingenmanse, the reason for such abundance of phraseological units with somatic components is that *“everyone has a body, and it is easy to refer to its parts, so the body is a very suitable source domain for expressing a variety of things”* (Dingenmanse 2006:59).

However, the usage of such phrases is not always safe. According to famous neuroscientists, *“a single negative word can increase the activity in our amygdala (the fear center of the brain). This releases dozens of stress-producing hormones and neurotransmitters, which in turn interrupts our brains’ functioning”* (Newberg & Waldman 2012:14).

Therefore, based on the works of neuroscientists and psycholinguists, the paper outlines the positive and negative impacts of phraseological units with somatic components on human health.

In the article “The Power of Words: How Words Impact Your Life”, a well-known author Katherine Hurst reminds us of a famous verse from the Bible:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>1</sup>

*Further, K. Hurst notes that “Words consist of vibration and sound. It is these vibrations that create the very reality that surrounds us. Words are the creator; the creator of our universe, our lives, our reality. Without words, a thought can never become a reality. This is something that we have been taught throughout history, as far back as the Bible, which writes of ‘God’ – whatever that word may mean to you – saying ‘let there be light’ and as a result creating light. So what can we learn from this? ... Surely,*

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<sup>1</sup>John 1. King James Version

*we should only pick the very best words in order to create our very best reality. Our thoughts also impact what we manifest in our lives. But it can be argued that the real power lies in our words. It is our words that provide a bold affirmation of our innermost thoughts. They are a confirmation to the world of how we see others, our lives and ourselves. It is this powerful affirmation that our words provide which enables our thoughts to manifest into a reality. So why do we choose to misuse our most powerful asset?" (Hurst 2016: 5)*

According to a famous Jewish author Yehuda Berg, “*Words have energy and power with the ability to help, to heal, to hinder, to hurt, to harm, to humiliate, and to humble.*”<sup>2</sup>

The “magic” power of words and phrases has been proved by numerous scientific experiments. Suffice to mention the experiment carried out by a Japanese scientist and water researcher Dr. Masaru Emoto, who has revealed that thoughts and vibrations affect the molecular structure of water. After studying water for many years through high speed photography of water crystals and by the use of MRA, a vibration measuring device to record emotional vibrations in humans, Dr Emoto observed that water reacts to the sound vibrations. The water crystals formed beautiful geometric shapes when words of love and gratitude were spoken near the water. But when evil words were uttered near another sample of water taken from the same source, the crystals smashed, they turned into destructed shapes. The research of Dr. Emoto showed that water has memory and affects things, for instance plants, trees and, above all, humans. It can have a strong impact on human consciousness, since 70% of human body consists of water. So, the words we hear have impressions on our heart and mind, because the water inside reacts accordingly. Dr. Emoto’s research provides enough evidence that the person complaining of someone’s bad attitude is hurt and is reacting for a reason. It is important to know how we can make someone’s day or ruin it with mere use of words, at times without even realizing how harsh or productive they were.<sup>3</sup>

According to an outstanding psychologist V. Sinelnikov, the subconscious perceives information literally. Therefore, we have to be very careful when selecting a word or a phraseological unit, or else, the meaning will be perceived directly by the human subconscious system, and this, in its turn, will lead to certain diseases (Sinelnikov 2018:7).

All the above-mentioned, naturally, also refers to phraseological units. It should be underlined that the phraseological units based on somatic components are the most vivid illustration of the above-mentioned scientific studies. According to the research carried out by numerous neuroscientists and psychologists, some of these units are harmful to our health (the ones with negative semantic content), whereas others (the ones with positive semantic content) are safe, and, what is more, have a certain healing power. Below I will discuss both types of phraseological units and their impact on human health. All the English empirical material is taken from numerous printed and electronic dictionaries of idioms. As for the Georgian material, it is taken from printed and online dictionaries as well as live colloquial speech.

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<sup>2</sup>Retrieved from [https://www.azquotes.com/author/18623-Yehuda\\_Berg](https://www.azquotes.com/author/18623-Yehuda_Berg)

<sup>3</sup>Retrieved from <https://dailytimes.com.pk/291794/the-science-behind-power-of-words/>

Let us start with the phraseological units based on the word “**head**”. According to Liz Burbo, the head symbolizes human individuality. If a person suffers from headaches, he/she criticizes and blames himself/herself too severely. Such a person frequently utters head-related idioms of negative semantic content (Burbo2016:49).

In English, the “threatening” idioms related to the word “head” are as follows:

*A kick in the head* – a thoroughly devastating or disappointing setback or failure;

*Be banging (one’s) head against a brick wall* – to be attempting, continuously and fruitlessly, to accomplish some task or achieve some goal that seems ultimately hopeless;

*Be shouting (one’s) head off* – to be yelling a lot or excessively;

*Bother (one’s) head about (something)* – to worry or concern oneself with something;

*Do (one’s) head in* – to cause one to feel bewildered;

*Have a (sudden) rush of blood to the head* –  
to have a sudden feeling of excitement or anger that causes one to act in unexpected ways;

*To have a hard head* – to be inflexible or stubborn; to be overly willful or obstinate, also to be a slow learner.

As for Georgian, the negative head-related idioms are:

„თავი ნუ ამტკივს“ /tavi nu amatkive/ (lit: don’t make my head ache), said to someone who talks too much, is too noisy or gets on our nerves;

„აუტკივართავიავიტკივე“ /autkivari tavi avitkive/ (lit: my head did not ache, but I made it ache), usually uttered when someone starts doing some hard job, while he/she could have avoided doing it;

ღამარტყათავში /damartq'a tavshi/ – it occurred to me suddenly, (lit: it hit my head);

გაგიხეთქავმაგთავს /gagixetqav mag tavs/ (lit: I will smash your head), menacing expression, sometimes uttered jokingly;

თავზარიდამეცა /tavzari dametsa/ – I was shocked (lit: a bell fell on my head);

თავიმომეჭრა /tavi mometchra/ – I was disgraced (lit: my head was cut off);

თავსატეხიგამიხნდა /tavsatexi gamichnda/ – I was puzzled (lit: my head was broken).

Thus, as we see, in both languages under analysis, head-related phraseological units are mostly of negative semantics. They can be harmful to human health, because, according to numerous psychologists, our subconscious perceives the meanings of these phraseological units literally. Hence, frequent uttering of such idioms leads to headaches and high blood pressure.

As for the phraseological units related to **eyes**, they are abundant in both English and Georgian languages. According to Sinelnikov, idioms of negative content related to eyes and eyesight express the unwillingness to see things clearly and are related to negative emotions like hatred, aggression and irritation (Sinelnikov 2018: 110).

The English idioms on eyes are:

*Bawl (one's) eyes out* – to sob or weep loudly, uncontrollably, and for a long period of time.

It should be mentioned that sobbing itself is caused by negative emotions; hence, it has a negative impact on human health. This impact is aggravated by the very expression which, in its turn, also affects the eyesight.

Other phraseological units related to eyes are:

*Close (one's) eyes to (something)* – to willfully ignore or overlook something;

*Give (someone or something) a black eye* –  
to make someone or something look bad; to damage someone's reputation;

*Hard on the eyes* – unattractive; ugly;

*Here is mud in your eye* – a convivial toast. The phrase is meant to be ironic. However, when taken literally by the sub-conscious of the hearer, this toast may lead to blurred eyesight.

The Georgian expressions related to eyesight are:

*თვალთარდამენახო /tvalit ar damenaxco/ (don't come into my eyesight)*, usually uttered by someone who is angry;

*მავიხდანახვაცარმინდა /I don't want to see him/her/,* referring to persons we do not want to see because we are angry with them.

According to neuroscientists, frequent usage of such expressions can lead to glaucoma, cataract, conjunctivitis and other ophthalmological diseases.

In both languages under analysis, there are numerous phraseological units related to **ear**. According to Sinelnikov, ear-related diseases are characteristic of people who refuse to accept different opinions and understand other people's viewpoints (Sinelnikov 2018: 109).

The English threatening idioms related to ear are:

*A flea in (one's) ear* – a sharp, strident, or disconcerting reproof;

*Fall on deaf ears* – to be ignored.

The Georgian phraseological units expressing the above-mentioned are:

აგონებაცარმინდა /gagonebats ar minda/ (I don't want to hear it);

ყურიარდაუგდო /yuri ar daugdo/ (refused to listen);

ჩემირჩევაყურადარილო /chemi rcheva q'urad ar ig'o/ (refused to take my advice);

ყურებიავწვა/q'urebi aetsva/ (lit: his ears are burning) –said when someone has a feeling that people are gossiping about him/her. The same expression is found in English: “*ears are burning*”.

As the heart is the most significant human organ, the greatest number of phraseological units in both English and Georgian are based on the word “**Heart**”. Psychologists consider that the heart is a symbol of life, love, joy and harmony. If a person frequently utters negative idioms related to heart, he/she suffers from the lack of love, unresolved emotional problems and excessive empathy to the problems of other people. “*Heart is the centre of total personality, especially with reference to intuition, feelings, emotions, moods, moral features or shortcomings and even memory. In addition, the heart is seen as a container, or in general, an ‘easily broken’ object*”(Oltean et al2014:13).

All the above-mentioned is clearly illustrated by phraseological units with the somatic component of heart. In the English language, the threatening ones are:

*(One's) heart bleeds for (someone)* – one feels sorrow or sadness for someone who is experiencing hardships;

*A faint heart* – timidity or lack of willpower preventing you from achieving your objective;

*Be sick at heart* –  
to be filled with a deeply unpleasant emotion, such as grief, remorse, dejection, etc;

*Break (one's) heart* – to cause or feel sadness, especially at the end of a romantic relationship.

The Georgian language also abounds in negative phraseological units related to heart. For instance:

გულზეგასკდომა /gulze gaskdoma/ (lit: burst at one's heart), meaning feeling unhappy for the reason of envy or anger;

გულისგახეთქვა /gulis gaxetqva/ (lit: smash one's heart), referring to shock or fear;

გულზეეკლადმაწევს /gulze eklad matsevs/ (lit: it is like a thorn in my heart), referring to an unresolved problem. The same meaning can be expressed by another idiom: გულზელოდადმაწევს /gulze lodad matsevs/ (lit: there is a large stone pressing my heart);

გულზეშემომეყარა /gulze shemomeq'ara/ (lit: my heart has been hit), meaning sudden shock;

გულზეცეცხლიმეკიდება /gulze tsetsxli mekideba/ (lit: my heart is on fire/, referring to stress, anger;

გულიმეთანადრება /guli metanag'reba/, referring to dissatisfaction;

გულიშემტკივა /guli shemtikiva/ (lit: my heart is in pain), means excessive sympathy or pity for someone;

გულიყელშიმომებჯინა /guli q'elshi momebjina/ (lit: my heart is pressing against my throat), referring to a strong feeling of being offended.

Another important part of the body is the **throat**. It is related to self-expression as well as acceptance of people, events, things, etc. In both languages, throat-related phraseological units are of negative connotation. The English idioms based on the word “throat” are as follows:

*Cut-throat* – meaning ruthless, merciless;

*Jump down someone’s throat* – to be very angry with someone;

*Have a lump in the throat* – feel like crying;

The corresponding Georgian idioms are:

ყელში ბურთი გაჩხირა /q’elshi burti gamechxira/ (lit: there is a ball stuck in my throat), correlate of the English “lump in the throat”;

ყელში ამომივიდა /q’elshi amomivida/ (lit: it is up to my throat), meaning “I am sick and tired of this”;

ყელი გამომჭრა /q’eli gamomtchra/ (lit: my throat has been cut off) – I am disgraced.

Finally, mention should be made of human limbs. In English, numerous negative idioms are related to **foot** and the ability to stand or walk. For instance:

*Can’t stand* – used to say that you do not like someone or something at all, or that you think that something is extremely unpleasant;

*The wrong foot* – a bad start;



*“Get/got off on the wrong foot”* or *“Start (off) on the wrong foot,”* applied to situations in which something goes or has gone awry at the very beginning;

*Be on the back foot* – be in a position of disadvantage;

*Bind someone hand and foot* – to cause one to feel trapped in a daunting situation;

*One foot in the grave* – on the verge of death.

The exact Georgian equivalent of the latter idiom is: ცალიფეხისამარეშიუდგას /tsali fexi samareshi udgas/.

In Georgian, idioms with negative connotation are related to the word – ფეხი – referring to both *leg* and *foot*. Thus, the threatening phraseological units are:

ფეხებიუკანმრჩება /fexebi ukan mrcheba/ (lit: my legs fall behind), uttered when we go somewhere unwillingly, just because of obligation;

ნეტაფეხიმტეხოდადაიქარმივსუღიყავი /neta fexi momtexoda da iq ar movsuliq’avi/ (lit: I wish I had broken my leg and not gone there), used when we regret having visited some place or person;

ფეხსითრევს /fexs itrevs/ (lit: drags one’s leg), meaning that someone is unwilling to go somewhere or start some activity;

ფეხიწაიტეხა /fexi tsaitexa/ (lit: broke his/her leg), meaning a failure;

ფეხიამთიკვეთა /fexi amoikveta/ (lit: cut one’s leg out), meaning that someone stopped visiting a certain place.

As for the word “**hand**”, the English idioms with negative connotation are as follows:

*(One’s) hands are tied* – one is being prevented from acting;

*From my cold, dead hands* – indicates that someone is unwilling to give something up;

The Georgian hand-related idioms are:

ამიხმესხელი /gamoxmes xeli/ (lit: may my hand wither), uttered when someone regrets having done something;

ხელიარამაქვს /xeli ara maqvs/ (lit: I have no hand), meaning “I have no right to do something”;

ხელისმოთავება /xelis motaveba/ (lit: to end one’s hand/, meaning to put an end to something;

ხელისშეშლა /xelis sheshla/ – to prevent, hamper.

Thus, as we have seen from the above-mentioned examples, the major parts of the body are vastly reflected in phraseological units of both languages under analysis. However, we should be very careful when uttering the idioms with negative meaning. A famous doctor Habib Sadeghi gives useful advice in this regard: *“Become aware of the negativity we generate both externally in what we say about ourselves, as well as internally through our “self-talk” inside our heads...choosing to exit a verbally negative situation is one of the healthiest and most healing things we can do”*<sup>4</sup>.

Luckily, in every language there are numerous phraseological units with positive somatic meaning. English and Georgian are not exceptions in this regard. Therefore, in our everyday speech we should try to use these units more frequently and altogether replace the above-given idioms of negative content with such positive ones. Below I will give some of the examples of phraseological units that make use of the body parts causing a positive impact on our subconscious, hence, having a healing effect on our health.

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<sup>4</sup>Retrieved from: <https://beingclarity.com/the-power-of-words-and-our-health/>

*Head and shoulders above* – being superior;

*Head start* – advantage;

*Cool head* – the ability to remain calm and rational in stressful situations;

*Don't worry your pretty little head about it* – don't stress yourself about a particular situation;

*Have one's head above water* – avoid being consumed by an unpleasant situation;

The positive Georgian expressions related to head are:

თავი მხრებზე მამბია /tavi mxrebze mabia/ (lit: my head is on my shoulders) – I am clever;

თავი ქუდში მაყვს /tavi qudshi maqvs/ (lit: my head is in the cap) – I am in a favourable situation.

In the English language, there are the following positive phraseological units related to eye:

*Gleam (stars) in one's eye* – happiness, amusement;

*Eagle's eye* – good eyesight;

*Easy on the eye* – attractive or aesthetically pleasing;

*Feast one's eyes on someone or something* – to gaze with joy or pleasure.

There are some positive Georgian examples too:

თვალსწყალიდავაღვინე /tvals tsq'ali davalevine/ (lit: I allowed my eyes to drink some water)–I enjoyed looking at the scenery;

თვალსუხარია /tvals uxaria/ (lit.the eye is joyful) – said about something that is pleasant to look at;

თვალისსინათლე /tvalis sinatle/ (lit. the light of the eye) – equivalent of the English “Apple of the eye”;

As for the ear, there are only a few idioms with positive content:

*Be music to one's ears* – be pleasant to hear;

*Be easy on the ear* – to have a pleasant sound.

ყურთასმენისდატკობა (lit: to sweeten the ear) – to listen to something pleasant, usually music.

The positive expressions referring to heart are more abundantly found in both languages:

*The heart is in the right place* – one means well or is good at heart;

*Do one's heart good* – to please someone;

*To have a light heart* – to be carefree and glad;

The Georgian positive expressions referring to heart are:

გულისაგულებსაქვს /guli sagules aqvs/ (lit: the heart is in the right place) – one is calm and carefree;

გულსუხარია /guls uxaria/ (lit: the heart is glad) – someone is glad, happy;

გულიმომეცა /guli mometsa/ (lit: the heart has been given to me) – I felt courageous.

Interestingly enough, positive phraseological units related to *throat* have not been found in any of the languages under analysis.

As for *foot* and *hand*, below I will bring some idioms of positive semantics:

*To put one's best foot forward* – present an ideal version of oneself;

*Get off on the right foot* – to have a lucky start.

ფეხზეწამოდგომა /fexze tsamodgoma/ (lit: to rise on one's foot/ – to become strong physically or materially;

ფეხისგადგმა /fexis gadgma/ (lit: to make roots with feet/ – to become widespread;

ფეხისმოკიდება /fexis mokideba/ (lit: to touch the ground with a foot) – establish a foothold.

*Safe pair of hands* – a trustworthy and competent person;

*Steady hand on the tiller* – full control over a situation;

*Have clean hands* – to be innocent.

ხელსმადლევის /xels madzlevs/ (lit: it gives me a hand) – it is profitable and favourable for me;

ხელისგამართვა /xelis gamartva/ (lit: straighten someone's hand) – to assist financially;

ხელისდამშვენება /xelis damshveneба/ (lit: to make one's hands pretty) – to visit someone bringing a present.

Thus, as we have seen, phraseological units with somatic components are abundantly found in both English and Georgian languages. Naturally, the above-given examples comprise only a small portion of such vocabulary units. There are numerous other idioms related to the above-mentioned parts of the body as well as other human organs. Such expressions are uttered on a daily basis by the speakers of both languages under analysis. However, based on the ample research carried out by cognitive neuroscientists and psychologists, we can conclude that in our everyday speech we should try to avoid using phraseological units with negative meaning and try to replace them with positive ones.

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