A LINGUOPRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT "TIME" IN ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

Dilyoraxon Aminjonova
PhD candidate (Doctoral student) at Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Abstract: *To illuminate the communicative potential of temporal phraseological units in authentic English discourse, this study approaches the concept of TIME through a linguopragmatic lens, moving beyond conventional semantic interpretation and cognitive categorisation. Rather than treating temporal idioms and proverbs merely as repositories of culturally embedded meanings, the analysis foregrounds their role in shaping interaction and conveying speakers' communicative intentions. Particular consideration is given to the range of pragmatic functions these expressions may perform, including warning, advising, reproaching, consoling, evaluating, and signalling degrees of epistemic certainty or uncertainty. Their discourse-dependent behaviour is examined across political, everyday, business, and literary contexts, drawing on key principles of speech act theory, Grice's Cooperative Principle, and politeness theory.*

A further dimension of the analysis concerns the dynamic relationship between the fixed form of a phraseological unit and its contextual realisation. Although idioms and proverbs are conventionally regarded as relatively stable linguistic structures, speakers may deliberately reshape them to achieve particular communicative effects. The study therefore examines such pragmatic adaptations as ellipsis, negation, irony, and nonce modification, demonstrating how contextual manipulation can transform an established expression into a flexible instrument of discourse. This perspective highlights the capacity of temporal phraseological units not only to encode the culturally conceptualised experience of TIME but also to perform context-sensitive communicative acts and influence the interpretation of discourse.

Keywords: *linguopragmatics, phraseological unit, concept TIME, speech act, cooperative principle, politeness, discourse, pragmatic transformation, occasional use.*

Introduction

A semantic or cognitive analysis can reveal the conventional meanings and conceptual metaphors embedded in phraseological units associated with TIME; however, such approaches alone cannot fully account for their context-dependent communicative behaviour. In actual discourse, the choice between expressions such as time will tell and high time, for instance, is not determined solely by their lexical or conceptual content. Likewise, an identical phraseological unit may convey reassurance in one communicative situation while expressing irritation or dissatisfaction in another. Such variation points to a dimension that extends beyond meaning as a stable linguistic property and concerns the way an expression functions once it is embedded in a particular discourse context. This perspective falls within the scope of linguopragmatics, which examines how the interpretation and communicative force of an

utterance emerge through the interaction of contextual factors, the speaker's communicative intentions, and the inferences drawn by the addressee.

This article advances the existing semantic-cognitive treatment of English temporal phraseology by examining the pragmatic dimension of these expressions. The analysis is organised around three closely connected questions: which communicative purposes are fulfilled by temporal phraseological units; in what ways do their pragmatic functions and effects differ according to the discourse context; and how can conventionally fixed phraseological patterns be adapted or modified when speakers seek to accomplish particular communicative objectives? The need for such a pragmatic perspective follows from the principle, emphasised by M. Hakimov in his discussion of the foundations of pragmalinguistics, that the meaning of a linguistic expression cannot be adequately interpreted independently of the speaker's communicative intention and the circumstances in which it is used. This consideration is particularly significant in the study of phraseology. Although phraseological units possess relatively stable and conventionalised forms, their actual communicative force is far from fixed. Once situated within a particular discourse environment, the same expression may acquire different pragmatic implications and serve substantially different interactional purposes.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

2.1. Linguopragmatics and Phraseological Meaning

From a linguopragmatic perspective, an utterance should be understood not simply as a linguistic vehicle for conveying propositional information, but as a communicative action whose interpretation is shaped by the context in which it occurs. In this respect, J. Austin's distinction among the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary aspects of speech provides a useful theoretical basis for classifying the communicative functions of temporal phraseological units. This framework was subsequently developed by J. Searle, who proposed a more systematic classification of speech acts into five major categories: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. The pragmatic potential of temporal phraseology can be illustrated by the expression no time to lose. At the locutionary level, the expression conveys the proposition that the available time is insufficient for delay. At the illocutionary level, however, it may function as a directive, urging the interlocutor to take immediate action. Its perlocutionary effect may, in turn, be reflected in the addressee's increased sense of urgency and consequent willingness to act without further delay.

From this perspective, phraseological units may be regarded as conventionalised resources for performing illocutionary acts. Rather than formulating a directive, expressive, or other speech act anew on each occasion, speakers can draw upon established linguistic formulas that are reproduced as conventional wholes. The pragmatic advantage of such expressions lies in the fact that their communicative force is socially recognisable and has become associated with the phrase through repeated use. Consequently, the speaker does not need to construct the intended illocutionary meaning entirely from individual lexical elements; instead, an established phraseological pattern provides a culturally and interactionally familiar means of accomplishing the intended communicative act.

2.2. The Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature

Grice's Cooperative Principle offers another useful perspective for explaining why speakers may favour temporal phraseological expressions over their more explicit literal equivalents. In particular, the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner provide a basis for examining how such expressions generate pragmatic meaning in interaction. Consider the phrase time will tell. Taken at face value, its use may appear to provide less information than would normally be expected under the maxim of quantity, since it does not supply an immediate or explicit response to an implied question concerning a future outcome. Nevertheless, this apparent lack of specificity is pragmatically meaningful rather than communicatively deficient. It can give rise to a conversational implicature whereby the speaker signals that the available evidence is insufficient to support a definite assessment at the present moment. By postponing a firm judgement and referring the resolution of the issue to future developments, the speaker simultaneously communicates epistemic caution and acknowledges the role of subsequent evidence in determining the outcome.

A comparable pragmatic effect can be observed in the use of take your time. When an interlocutor is expected to respond or make a decision without delay, this expression may initially appear inconsistent with the maxim of relation, as it does not directly advance the immediate task or resolve the issue at hand. Its communicative value, however, lies precisely in its ability to suspend the presupposed need for urgency. By using take your time, the speaker signals that the addressee is not expected to prioritise speed and that careful consideration is valued more highly than an immediate response. The expression therefore functions not merely as a reference to temporal duration, but as a pragmatic means of regulating the pace of interaction and conveying respect for the addressee's judgement.

2.3. Politeness and Face

Politeness theory, particularly the framework proposed by P. Brown and S. Levinson, provides a further explanation of the pragmatic variability observed in temporal phraseology. At the centre of their model is the notion of "face", referring to the socially recognised self-image that interlocutors seek to preserve during interaction. From this perspective, temporal phraseological expressions can function as strategies for mitigating the interpersonal force of potentially face-threatening acts. This is especially evident with directive expressions, which may encroach upon the addressee's negative face, namely, the expectation of freedom from unwanted pressure or imposition. Temporal phraseology can reduce such pressure by presenting an otherwise urgent directive in a less confrontational form. Thus, take your time mitigates the potential face threat associated with demanding an immediate response, whereas there is no time like the present can address the interpersonal sensitivity surrounding criticism of procrastination. Rather than directly attributing delay to the addressee, the latter expression frames immediate action as a broadly accepted principle, thereby transforming a potentially personal reproach into a more general and socially acceptable observation.

3. Communicative Functions of Temporal Phraseological Units

Building on this theoretical apparatus, temporal phraseological units in English can be classified according to their dominant illocutionary function, while recognizing that a single

unit may carry secondary functions depending on context. Table 1 summarizes this classification for a representative set of units drawn from the wider corpus of the study.

Phraseological unit	Primary speech-act type	Pragmatic effect
No time to lose / It is high time	Directive (urging action)	Compresses a call to immediate action into a single formula, reducing the need for elaborate justification.
Take your time	Directive with face-saving intent	Grants the addressee psychological latitude, lowering perceived pressure.
Time will tell / Only time will tell	Assertive with epistemic hedging	Defers a firm judgement, protecting the speaker from over-commitment.
Time heals all wounds	Expressive / consolatory	Offers comfort while implicitly requesting patience from the addressee.
Better late than never	Assertive with mitigated evaluation	Softens criticism of lateness by reframing it as an acceptable outcome.
Behind the times	Expressive (evaluative, often face-threatening)	Signals social or professional disapproval, typically used about a third party.
The time has come	Declarative (legitimizing an action)	Frames a decision or event as historically or morally due, increasing its rhetorical weight.

Table 1. Communicative functions of representative English temporal phraseological units.

A similar pragmatic mechanism can be observed in the expression take your time. In a situation where an immediate decision or response is anticipated, the expression may appear, at first glance, to be unrelated to the communicative demands of the situation and thus to conflict with the maxim of relation. Its apparent lack of direct relevance, however, serves a specific interactional purpose. Rather than reinforcing the expectation of immediate action,

the speaker deliberately removes or reduces the presupposed urgency and grants the addressee greater freedom to deliberate. In this way, take your time communicates that the quality and independence of the addressee's judgement are considered more important than the speed with which a decision is reached. The phrase therefore operates as a pragmatic strategy for regulating interpersonal interaction while simultaneously conveying consideration for the addressee.

4. The Role of Temporal Phraseological Units in Discourse

The communicative force of a temporal phraseological unit is inherently context-sensitive and may be significantly reshaped by the discourse environment in which the expression is employed. In political discourse, for example, expressions such as the time has come and it is high time can be strategically deployed to legitimise a particular course of action. Rather than presenting a decision as the result of an individual political preference, these expressions construct it as a response to circumstances that have supposedly reached a decisive or long-awaited point. The rhetorical effect is consequently to externalise the source of obligation: the necessity for action appears to arise from the historical moment itself rather than from the speaker's personal will.

A somewhat different pragmatic pattern can be observed in business and institutional communication. Expressions such as invest time, time is money, and buy time draw on an economically oriented conceptualisation of TIME and commonly function as relatively neutral framing devices within arguments concerning productivity, efficiency, and resource management. Their persuasive potential is often accompanied by limited interpersonal face threat because the values they invoke are presented as shared principles of professional and organisational practice rather than as direct judgements about an individual interlocutor.

Everyday conversation reveals considerably greater pragmatic and emotional flexibility. Depending on the interactional circumstances, take your time may provide reassurance and reduce pressure between friends, while no time to lose can encourage coordinated and immediate action in a shared task. Similarly, time flies may evoke nostalgia when participants reflect on the rapid passage of time during a social encounter. In literary discourse, temporal phraseological expressions may acquire an additional stylistic function by condensing complex psychological or emotional experiences into culturally recognisable images. As work by E. Semino on metaphor in discourse demonstrates, metaphorical expressions can contribute substantially to the representation of experience. Thus, time stood still can encapsulate a character's perception of shock or overwhelming emotion, whereas time dragged may convey boredom, suffering, or psychological distress without requiring lengthy descriptive exposition.

Taken together, these patterns demonstrate that the pragmatic interpretation of temporal phraseology cannot be reduced to the conventional meanings recorded in dictionaries. The communicative value of a given unit emerges through the interaction of its conventionalised meaning with the discourse genre, the roles and relationship of the participants, the situational circumstances, and the communicative objective pursued by the speaker. Temporal phraseological units should therefore be regarded as context-sensitive pragmatic resources

whose functions may range from legitimisation and persuasion to reassurance, mobilisation, evaluation, and the economical expression of complex emotional states.

5. Contextual and Pragmatic Transformation

An additional aspect of the linguopragmatic behaviour of temporal phraseological units is revealed in the deliberate modification of their conventional forms to achieve particular communicative effects. Such context-driven departures from canonical patterns are commonly described as occasional or nonce uses. Within English temporal phraseology, several recurrent types of pragmatic transformation can be identified.

Negation as a pragmatic intensifier. As demonstrated in the analysis of the TIME semantic field, expressions such as no time to lose and there is no time like the present employ negation in a function that extends beyond simple semantic denial. The negative construction strengthens the pragmatic force of the expression by foregrounding the absence of an acceptable opportunity for delay. Consequently, the negative form may communicate urgency more effectively than an equivalent affirmative formulation.

Ironic reinterpretation. A phraseological unit conventionally associated with consolation or reassurance may acquire an entirely different illocutionary force when used ironically. For example, time heals all wounds, accompanied by sarcastic intonation in response to a relatively insignificant complaint, may communicate indifference or dismissal rather than sympathy. In such cases, the lexical composition of the phrase remains unchanged, while contextual cues and prosodic features trigger a reversal of its intended communicative effect. The example demonstrates that phraseological meaning and illocutionary force do not necessarily operate in a one-to-one relationship.

Lexical substitution and extension. Speakers may also manipulate the lexical structure of an established expression by replacing or expanding one of its components in order to increase its relevance to a particular situation. Variations based on against the clock, for instance, can be adapted to refer to a specific deadline, task, or competitive circumstance. Although the surface form is modified, the underlying conceptual configuration—TIME AS AN OPPONENT—remains recognisable. The modification therefore simultaneously preserves the conventional conceptual frame and directs its interpretation towards the immediate discourse situation.

Ellipsis and truncation. In spontaneous conversation, phraseological expressions may be reduced to abbreviated forms when the omitted material can be readily reconstructed by the interlocutor. The use of high time, for example, may evoke the fuller construction it is high time that... without requiring its complete verbal realisation. Such truncation relies on the addressee’s phraseological competence and enables the speaker to convey the established pragmatic force of the expression through a minimal linguistic cue.

Taken collectively, these transformations reveal an apparent tension between the structural stability of phraseological units and their functional adaptability in discourse. At the level of the language system, phraseological stability is associated with conventionalisation and reproducibility; at the level of actual communication, however, speakers can manipulate these established patterns in response to specific interactional demands. Importantly, such flexibility does not undermine the principle of phraseological

reproducibility. On the contrary, it presupposes it. A modified expression can be recognised as ironic, intensified, abbreviated, or contextually narrowed only when the addressee is able to identify the conventional phraseological pattern underlying the deviation. Thus, canonicality and creativity should not be viewed as mutually exclusive properties: the communicative creativity of phraseological use is made possible precisely by the recognisability of the conventional form.

6. Discussion

When considered collectively, the speech-act perspective, cross-discourse comparison, and examination of context-driven modification point towards a broader understanding of temporal phraseology as a set of highly economical pragmatic resources. English temporal phraseological units do more than encode culturally established representations of TIME; they can actively regulate the temporal, interpersonal, and evaluative dimensions of communication. The semantic-cognitive analysis identifies the conceptual frameworks through which TIME is represented—as money, movement, an adversary, a healer or judge, and a socially established norm—whereas the linguopragmatic perspective demonstrates how these conceptualisations can be strategically activated in interaction.

The same conceptual representation may therefore support substantially different communicative objectives. Temporal expressions can be employed to create pressure and accelerate a course of action, or, conversely, to reduce pressure and encourage deliberation. They may convey criticism while maintaining interpersonal distance, or provide consolation without committing the speaker to an absolute assurance. Similarly, they can present an assessment with apparent certainty or deliberately leave room for future developments through epistemic hedging. Such functional contrasts indicate that the pragmatic potential of temporal phraseology emerges from the interaction of several factors: the speech act being performed, the discourse environment in which the expression occurs, the relationship between interlocutors, and any contextual modification imposed upon its conventional form. Consequently, the study of TIME in English phraseology benefits from integrating semantic-cognitive modelling with linguopragmatic analysis, since only their combination can account for both the conceptual structure of temporal expressions and the diverse communicative purposes they fulfil in actual discourse.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that a comprehensive account of the concept of TIME in English phraseology cannot be achieved through semantic and cognitive analysis alone; it also requires systematic consideration of the linguopragmatic dimension. By bringing together speech act theory, Grice’s Cooperative Principle, and Brown and Levinson’s politeness framework, the analysis has established that temporal phraseological units possess a diverse pragmatic repertoire, encompassing directive functions, epistemically hedged assertions, expressive acts, and, in certain contexts, declarative functions. Their communicative force is not uniform but is conditioned by discourse type, interactional circumstances, and the relationship between the participants. Moreover, the analysis of negation, irony, lexical substitution, and ellipsis demonstrates that even highly

conventionalised phraseological forms remain open to context-sensitive modification without losing their recognisability as established units.

The findings consequently challenge the view of temporal phraseological units as merely fixed carriers of culturally inherited representations. Instead, they emerge as dynamic pragmatic resources through which speakers can regulate urgency, negotiate interpersonal relations, express evaluation, manage epistemic commitment, and respond flexibly to particular communicative situations. The study therefore establishes a stronger connection between the conceptual representation of TIME and its functional realisation in discourse. By demonstrating how conventional phraseological structure interacts with communicative intention and contextual interpretation, the research provides a methodological foundation for subsequent corpus-based investigations and cross-linguistic comparisons of temporal phraseology and its pragmatic functioning.

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