STYLISTICO-PRAGMATIC ASPECT OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS

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Articolul prezent este consacrat cercetării aspectului stilistic şi celui pragmatic al expresiilor idiomatice în limba engleză. Se întreprinde un studiu descriptiv al expresiilor idiomatice şi clasificarea lor conform particularităţilor stilistice şi domeniului de întrebuinţare a acestora. Sunt comparate definiţiile şi clasificările propuse de specialişti în domeniul frazeologiei cu privire la apartenenţa idiomurilor la diferite straturi ale vocabularului, distingând idiomurile care aparţin limbajului formal şi celui neformal. De asemenea, se analizează idiomuri ce se disting conform criteriului informativ-funcţional în cele ideaţionale, interpersonale şi relaţionale.

The style of an idiomatic expression is regarded as the reflection of certain variable factors in situations in which that expression is normally used. Among the most significant of those factors are:

1. the social relationship between the speakers or correspondents (which may be that of friend to friend, employer to employee, etc.).

2. the setting (communication may take place over a drink in a bar, or at an official reception).

3. the degree of seriousness, light-heartedness, etc. adopted by the speakers – possibly an imposed or suggested by the setting (the pre-match banter in a changing room in comparison with a discussion at a board meeting). An idiom marked 'formal' will tend to reflect a distant rather than a close relationship, be more likely to be associated with an official setting and tend to suggest a serious or elevated tone: *make answer/ reply*-answer, reply.

According to Schmidt's theory, an idiom marked 'informal' reflects an intimate rather than a distant relationship, a domestic rather than an official occasion; an easy, relaxed attitude: *take it easy*-not become so flustered, angered, excited, etc. [1].

It should be mentioned that most idiomatic expressions are stylistically neutral, in the sense that they fall somewhere between the limits represented by the labels 'formal' and 'informal', and they can be used in any situation. It should be also stated that stylistic values are constantly shifting and the conventions observed by individual speakers and writers differ considerably. One of the main differences is that the learner does not know in which situations it is correct to use an idiomatic expression [2]. He does not know the level of style, that is, whether an idiom can be used in a formal or in an informal situation. This choice is determined by the person one is speaking to and by the situation or place at the time. We may use informal or even slang expressions if the person is a friend and the situation is private. In a formal situation, when we do not know the person one is speaking to very well or the occasion is public, we choose words much more carefully. According to Seidl, it would be wrong to choose an informal expression in some rather formal situation and it would signal bad manners to choose a slang expression [3]. This means that we can express the same information or idea in more than one way resorting to different language registers.

 The expressions marked 'formal' are found in written more frequently than in spoken English and are used to show a distant relationship between the speakers. Such expressions would be used for example when making a formal speech to a large audience. Expressions marked 'informal' are used in every-day spoken English and in personal letters. Slang expressions are used in very informal situations between good friends. It is advisable for learners to concentrate on the informal idiomatic expressions, which are neutral in style and can be used in any situation [4]. Another major difficulty is that the learner does not know whether an idiom is natural or appropriate in a certain situation. This can only be learnt by careful listening to native speakers or careful reading of English texts, which contain idiomatic expressions. The third major difficulty is that of fixed idioms and partially fixed idioms. It is most important that the learner should be exact in his use of fixed idioms, as an inaccurate idiom may mean very little or even nothing at all to a native speaker. Above all we have to remember that it is usually extremely unwise to translate idiomatic expressions into English from one's own native language [5]. One may be lucky that the two languages have the same form and vocabulary, but in most cases, the result will be utterly bewildering to the native- speaker, and possibly highly amusing.

Apart from the stylistic value of idiomatic expressions, in analysing idioms, one is confronted with the main informative types. F. Chitra is the linguist who brought into discussion this classification. He recognized three types of idiomatic expressions in this respect: *ideational, interpersonal, and relational idiomatic expressions*. Thus, ideational idiomatic expressions are referred to as representing images of the world, specific emotions, and attitudinal appraisals. Interpersonal idiomatic expressions are viewed in the context of such occasions like Christmas and New Year greetings, birthday greetings, condolence, sympathy, and congratulations etc. Relational idiomatic expressions are considered as vehicles of logical and temporal coherence. All these types are given to show the informational complexities of idioms. It can be noted that ideational idioms of various types convey packages of information about their attributes and circumstances in the world of the senders and receivers of such information. Idioms of this type contribute to the context of a discourse [6].

In real world there is only the concrete, the particular, and the idiosyncratic; vocabulary categorizes and in doing so picks on the shared, unifying features in its real life referents in order to establish super-ordinate classes such as phenomena, entities, creatures, etc. and also their subclasses of increasing particularity, for example, animal, human, men, women, children, etc. Idioms which seem general like *every man and his dog* 'everybody' and *every Tom, Dick, and Harry* 'average people', have bits of information in their semantic make-up, which constrain that generality so that words like 'humans' and 'mankind' do. Terms that underspecify and those that overspecify are marked for contextual distribution.

Different from the general, but applied to it by virtue of the under-specification, is the vague, the imprecise. Vague idioms permit the elimination of superfluous repetition as one of three functions: 'There'd be shadows, the underside would be darker, and the upper side lighter *and so on'*. Vague idioms allow for the imprecision that arises from lack of specific knowledge, or that which comes from memory lapses. Where the information is not significant in itself, the vague idiom is designed to be filler or it is used to refer to the approximate time where this is permissible: 'and er… they couldn't have been more helpful *blah blah blah'*. The specific information is sometimes not available and not even always essential as in casual conversation [7].

Idioms with seeming general reference have restrictive components of meaning, which reduce the generality in comparison with the all-encompassing reference of phenomena, entities, and creatures or the somewhat less encompassing humans and people. Thus *man in the street* refers only to men and women of average ability. Just as there are varying degrees of generality, there are also varying degrees of specificity: 'man' and 'woman' are more specific than 'human'. The specificity of a word is to modify it either adjectivally or adverbially. Ideational idiomatic expressions subcategorize a more general category: human can be categorized as men and women. In Collins' opinion, the lexicalization of such types depends on how culturally salient they are [8].

Language users are able to remember and connect repeated vocabulary items, single and multiword, in different discourses even though these may be separate in time and place. *Wear different hats* tends to be associated with holders of public office and *fat cats* with public servants. Apart from helping the language user to elaborate meaning profiles, repeated contextualization also leads to predictable collocates allied to such items.

Ideational idiomatic expressions include a subgroup of idioms representing the states of heart: grief and anger. Grief and its single-synonymous (anguish, misery, suffering, despondency, distress, sadness, sorrow, pain, disappointment, etc.) are emotion terms whose signification also appears in idioms. If joy makes people behave in a playful, exuberant way, especially at its height, grief produces apathy, lethargy, and immobility. Grief is a component of situations characterized by emptiness and bareness due to the bereavement, the absence of those we love and other sorts of disappointment [9]. Predictably, the metaphor implicit in many of the idioms signifying grief is the opposite of up: grief (sad) is down: 'I slipped steadily *down bill'*. Coldness and sometimes dryness, the typical attributes of fear, also suggest the saturnine influence: *get/ have cold feet; to make one's blood run cold*. The directionality of up and down creates a metaphorical parallelism between an emotional state and a physical direction.

Every emotive expression in English, however, cannot be explained in terms of the theory of rumors. The most vehement expression of anger and disgust are the expletives directed against the self or another. These are the taboo words, profanities relating to religion (*Christ's blood and wounds*) [10]. The body parts in idiomatic expressions signifying disgust are typically those located in the lower part of the body: the stomach

(belly), and the eliminatory and sexual organs. The heart symbolizes the soul, productive of the affections, joy and love, grief and sympathy, and the head symbolizes the spirit productive of intelligence and reason. The lower in contrast, symbolize coarser states like gluttony and lust. Consequently they are just right for vehement expressions of disgust, anger, exasperation, frustration, etc. [11].

Obscenities are often used to express emotions, generally negative; implicitly which are similarly negative evaluations. The four-letter word as an expletive or as one element in some multiword expressions is selected as a vehicle for such emotions and attitudes for obvious reasons: it is one of the most offensive word in English (*the f... bastard*).

Be mad a metaphorical idiom, is interesting because in form it coincides in part with the idiom signifying intense love, *be mad about somebody*. Here it signifies intense anger. The common semantic component is mental disorientation, a feature seen as being shared by both love and anger. The idioms of emotion are unified by the theory they exemplify, which in turn generates clusters of metaphors characteristic of various aspects of an emotion, such as joy or anger. The idioms signifying anger, caused by choler, exemplify the various characteristics of temperament and complexion of this rumor. The major difference between the folklore view emotion and that of current psychological theories consists in the dichotomy of emotion and reason, appearing in the opposition of heart and head in popular thinking. According to recent psychological theory, emotional action tendencies are preceded by flashes of cognitive appraisals, exemplified by such criteria as 'pleasant', 'unpleasant', and 'safe', 'unsafe'. While emotional idioms are conventionalized, and like all other idioms exemplify the workings of the idiom principle, they are not automatized or formulaic in the way some idioms are, for example *God Save the Queen*[12]. Idioms of emotion do not typically seem to show the elaboration of imagery or the novel variations that so often constitute the innovative element in other sorts of ideational idioms like the *red herring*. Emotions are internal and formless, language in this case primarily idioms signifying internal states through images, gives emotions form and so empowers the language user to concretize the amorphous by bringing two different experiential gestalts into analogical correspondence.

Another subgroup of ideational idiomatic expressions is represented by attitudinal appraisals of manners and morals of men and women. Manners and morals are never neutral as they are attitudinal appraisals. An attitude may be defined as a favorable, unfavorable, or ambivalent emotional bias on the part of a person to other persons, objects, happenings, etc. though not an emotion like joy or anger, an attitude is closely allied to an emotion in that it too is expressive of intra-psychic action tendencies: moving towards (good), moving away from (bad), moving against either bad or good as the case may be. Like emotions, attitudes originate in cognitive appraisal and are, if anything, more strongly evaluative than emotions [13]. According to Chitra's theory, it may be possible to produce a totally neutral, non-committal text, in reality such texts are not produced except in special circumstances. In non-technical, informal discourse such as conversation, or journalism, attitudinal appraisal of the topic of discourse and of the addressee are clearly present, sometimes markedly so.

Thus, attitudes and their implicit appraisals have the following functions: they contribute to making the purpose of a text identifiable, constituting as they do part of the information package exchanged in any interaction. Though an individual item, as *red herring*, can generate different context-specific attitudes, in longer texts there are enough cues for one attitude to emerge and be identified by the addressee as being the preferred one. The identification of such global attitude helps us read between the lines of a discourse to get at covered meanings. Attitudes generate discourse by introducing a dynamic component into an interaction: participants respond to attitudes whether these generate conviviality or conflict.

The discussion will further focus on attitudinal appraisals of manners and morals. An attitude has already been defined as an emotional bias on the part of the sender of that message or to the receiver or to both. Some idioms are used as titles of news reports in newspapers. Such a use foregrounds idioms as succinct appraisals of the way of the world, which place the topic of the text that follows in relation to the value system, the cultural ethos of the readers, and by extension the society they belong to. Ideational idioms, which are proverbs, serve as vehicles of the conventional wisdom. As such they may seem to straightjacket the language user both linguistically and intellectually. However, resourceful language users resort to inventive imitation to express new meanings through variations of conventional expressions [14]. As for the intellectual side conventional wisdom ensures cultural continuity: *let sleeping dogs lie*, for example. To the language user, idioms offer familiar succinct ways of getting across complex information packages, not only in terms of referential function,

but also in terms of the attitudinal, evaluative one. Language users fulfill many roles: that of reporter, persuader, apologist, and so on. But whatever the role, it never brings forth discourse that is neutral in context. Provocative, individualistic ideologies are all very good for philosophers and poets, for example, the idiom *every Tom, Dick and Harry* feels most comfortable with the conventional [15].

The second type of idiomatic expressions issued by F. Chitra is called interpersonal idiomatic expressions, which occur in discourse with a pragmatic function. Personal experiences vary greatly from individual to individual but such idiosyncratic differences are offset by communal, institutionalized events invested with shared meanings and a conventionalized set of expressions conveying these meanings. Those events that are institutionalized are universal, for example, birth, illness and death, marriage, travel, and professional success. The 'borrowed' idioms used by the sender because of their formulaic or semi-formulaic nature are easily interpreted in a culturally way by the receiver. In Cowie's opinion, the sender adopts a persona created by the card industry: humorous, sentimental, sympathetic, genial, etc. The act of sending a card indicates attracttion on the senders' part for the intended recipient. The intention is to maintain and enhance a current relationship [16].

The birthday as a social institution arises only in cultures where ages are known and constitute transitional points in one's life. A common of the birthday message is the speciality of the recipient or the wishes, though in that way remains undefined. The humors birthday card, apart from the formulaic *Happy Birthday*, has to be novel to make its point. A typical gag takes form of: *Turning 39/ 40/ 45, isn't so bad, let's see…*followed by a number of variables such as a broad smile/ your lovely hair, etc. with a drawing of a toothless grin/ a balding head, or some other sign of ageing, generally exaggerated. These examples are modeled on gags from greeting cards. Humorous birthday cards are designed for the ageing in a society where youth is celebrated and consequently, age is something of an embarrassment with humor being one of coming to terms with. Besides there are other events which also have a cultural significance and evoke conventionalized responses. Each has its own formulae expression.

Death like aging is something people can really be certain of. When certain attitude becomes reality, moral support is necessary which unlike in the case of aging appears not as humor, but as sympathy: *Extending/ With Deepest/ Sincere Sympathy*. The key phrase in condolences is *With deepest /sincere sympathy*.

The third type of idiomatic expressions, classified according to their pragmatic status is called relational idiomatic expressions. Language-users employ interpersonal idioms, semi-idioms, and collocations of various types in a variety of interactive functions, greetings and farewells being among the most common. Such idioms also enable their users to signpost verbal interactions so that organizational structure, the beginning, the body, the conclusion, is clear.

The primary function of relational idioms of various types is to make explicit the semantic unit of a discourse. Explicit connectives need to be used at various points in a discourse depending on its length and subject-matter in order to make it more complex semantic connections clear. The relational idiom *not only…but also* establishes an intra- sentential semantic connection between two clauses. Idiomatic relational expressions, like their ideational and interpersonal cousins, are more specific in terms of their semantics than they approximate single-word counterparts. In addition to exemplifying semantic relations such as causality, addition, concession, etc., multiword relational expressions are dead metaphors of a spatial or visual kind: *as far as; in view of*, etc. A few like the contrastive *on the one hand… on the other* show body part imagery. These images reinforce the specificity of relational idiomatic expressions. Some relational idioms with a conjunctive as well as anaphoric function show cohesive functions in the words that are used in their make-up: *in addition, furthermore, on the contrary, quite the reverse*, etc. Other relational idiomatic expressions, for example, *as a result of, in order to, on the grounds of,* etc. make the coherence a logical consistency of a discourse explicit and in this way strengthen its explanatory adequacy [17].

The comparison of ideational, interpersonal, and relational idiomatic expressions focuses on their respective functions. In the formal aspects, these expressions favor different types of constituents in their syntactic make-up, differences corresponding to their different functions: phrasal verbs, noun phrases, and semi-clauses of various types abound among ideational idiomatic expressions; appropriate pronouns mark interpersonal expressions, overtly and covertly; the relational group is distinguished from the other two either by conjunctive or sequencing idioms and by expressions signaling the location in time of an event or of its duration, long or short.

Table

Pragmatic Classification of Idiomatic Expressions proposed by Chitra

Ideational Expressions	Interpersonal Expressions	Relational Expressions
Contribute to the subject-matter of a discourse by functioning as impressionistic packages of information	Organize the flow of verbal exchanges and facilitate interaction between language users, especially in promoting conviviality	At the micro level they relate phrases or classes within sentences (intra-sentential) or relate sentences within a discourse (inter-sentential), indicate a point in time, or temporal duration. At the macro level they relate portions of a discourse, for example, paragraphs introducing new topics (meta-discoursal). Macro-relational expressions also indicate a global-temporal frame.

In conclusion it should be mentioned that the main distinction within the style of idiomatic expressions offers two main labels of formal and informal. But the majority of idiomatic expressions are stylistically neutral, as they fall somewhere in between the limits of the two labels. From the pragmatic point of view, F. Chitra divided idiomatic expressions into three groups: 'ideational' idiomatic expressions, which offer only over-specification of talking about the world, thoughts, feelings, emotions; 'interpersonal' idiomatic expressions that represent conventionalized universal expressions; and 'relational' idiomatic expressions, which make explicit the semantic unity of a discourse.

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