

IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS DESCRIBING APPEARANCE AND CHARACTER

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Expresia idiomatice este o frază sau un enunț ce nu permite schimbarea topicii cuvintelor în interiorul său, fiind, ca și locuțiunea, îmbinare fixă. Idiomele nu pot fi traduse întocmai în nicio limbă străină. Ele pot fi utilizate în vorbire cu intenția de a descrie diferite aspecte, precum: acțiuni, comportamente, profesii, obiceiuri, locuri, popoare, tipuri de caractere etc. În prezentul articol vom stabili etimologia termenului „expresie idiomatice” și vom da definiția acestuia. Obiectivul nostru rezidă în a clasifica expresiile idiomatice în diferite grupuri și în a explica sensul idiomelor utilizate la descrierea aspectului fizic și a caracterului unei persoane. Acest limbaj specific adaugă un colorit deosebit graiului, ajutând oratorul să scoată în evidență acele trăsături de caracter sau detalii exterioare pe care el le consideră a fi mai importante. Expresiile idiomatice sunt, de asemenea, instrumente utile pentru a transmite un volum mare de informație în doar câteva cuvinte.

Today the English language is widely spoken throughout the world. It is the language of the 21st century so while describing it one should know not only its standard vocabulary but also its different styles, dialects, proverbs, sayings, phrasal verbs and idioms, as they are used in any sphere: books, films, newspapers, formal speeches. One, looking through some papers, magazines and journals, will discover the same language to sound quite different, because he will find familiar words with unfamiliar meanings.

Socio-linguistic studies have shown that the general tendencies of present-day English are towards more idiomatic usage. Therefore it is important to remember that idioms are not only colloquial expressions associated with conversation and informal language, a separate part of the language, which one can choose either to use or to omit, they form an essential part of the vocabulary of English. Idioms help speakers and writers to be fluent and to get their opinions across effectively, as they have an important role in conveying evaluation and in developing or maintaining interaction

But we cannot write about idioms without knowing their etymology. If we look back into history, trying to find the origin of the term idiom, we discover that it comes from the Greek lexeme *idioms*, meaning “own, private, peculiar”

In different dictionaries there could be found quite a lot different explaining what an idiom is. There are some of the definitions:

1. An idiom is an expression whose meaning is not predictable from the usual meanings of its constituent elements or from the general grammatical rules of a language and that is not a constituent of a larger expression of like characteristics [3, p.15].
2. Idiom – a form of expression, grammatical construction, phrase, etc., peculiar to a person or language; a phrase which is understood by speakers of a particular language despite its meaning's not being predictable from that of the separate words [5, p.11].

In linguistics, idioms are usually presumed to be figures of speech contradicting the principle of compositionality; yet the matter remains debated. In phraseology, they are defined in a similar way as a sub-type of phraseme whose meaning is not the regular sum of the meanings of its components. An idiom is an expression, word, or phrase whose sense means something different from what the words literally imply. The idiom “*beating around the bush*” means to hint or discuss obliquely; nobody is literally beating any person or thing, and the bush is a metaphor. When a speaker uses an idiom, someone listening to that speaker might attribute an incorrect meaning to that idiom if the listener has not encountered that specific figure of speech before. Idioms usually do not translate well; in some cases, when an idiom is translated into another language, either its meaning is changed or it is meaningless.

The origin of idioms is closely connected with people's mentality. The present day English can't be considered full of value without idiomatic usage, as the use of idioms is the first sign of a certain language's developing. Idiomatic sentences enrich a language and the knowledge of idioms signal that the speaker knows the language on the level of a native speaker. Idioms are a colourful and fascinating aspect of English. They are commonly used in all types of language, written and spoken. Idioms also suggest a particular attitude of the

person using them, for example disapproval, humour, exasperation, respect or admiration, so they must be used carefully, to not to make people misunderstand or understand you incorrectly.

People often use idioms in order to create a sense of “camaraderie” with the people they are speaking to or writing for: idioms make language seem more lively and interesting, friendlier and more informal. Because of this, idioms are generally considered informal. In fact, idioms are often used in contexts which are not informal at all. That is why idioms should be used attentively, in other case they may be interpreted as critical or disapproving, and therefore unintentionally cause the wrong reaction.

Idioms are also used to give emphasis or to organize speech, to paraphrase what is going on, and what is being said. Everyone who studies English knows that it is full of idiomatic expressions. There are over 25,000 idioms in the English language, so it is impossible to learn them all. Of course, they are divided into some groups, or categories – for example, idioms, which are used in Britain, in Australia, in America, in other countries, where people speak English, or idioms, which are not often used now because they are old-fashioned, but still they exist in books and other sources of historical information.

Idioms are a very important part of the language, because a reflection of country’s history and nation’s traditions can be found there. Idiomatic expressions often have an unexpected origin which makes readers to look deeper in Britain’s history. Some idioms of the “worldwide English” have first been seen in the works of writers like Shakespeare, Sir Walter Scott, Lewis Carroll or even in the paperbacks of contemporary novelists. An example of Shakespearian quotation can be found in the following sentence: “*As a social worker, you certainly see the seamy side of life.*” Biblical references are also the source of many idioms. Sports, technical and legal terms, military slang and even nautical expressions have found their way to the everyday use of English language.

It is always interesting to learn where idioms came from, why exactly people say, for example, “*to kick the bucket*”. A native speaker likely won’t think about it, because for him the meaning “*to die*” was known for all his life, but for people who are only studying English it might seem curious. Why to kick and why the bucket? What is the connection between these words? The answer to these questions can be found. In slaughterhouses, the rail on which pigs are hung after slaughter to drain off the blood is called “*the bucket bar*”. The dead pig sometimes “*kicks*” the bucket bar because of muscle spasms, what many years ago affected people to think of such expression. Idioms, as well as proverbs and sayings are very specific parts of every language. They have been forming for many centuries and were influenced by nation’s living place, culture, customs and other circumstances. So people, who want to study English language thoroughly and have a look at language’s connection with culture, should first of all learn something about idiomatic expressions origins [1, p.55].

An idiom is a word, phrase or expression, which has a meaning that is not obvious from the individual words in it. In other words idioms are metaphors, whose meanings are not literal, but are figurative and only known through their common uses. Usually idiom’s meaning is not deducible and does not have an analogue in others languages so it often is quite difficult for non-native speakers, especially ones who are not good at the language, to understand and to use them properly. Nevertheless, many idioms have their equivalents in other languages. In some cases, it is fairly easy to see how the idiomatic meaning relates to the literal meaning. For example, “*kill two birds with one stone*” means “*to achieve two things at the same time*”, and the image in the metaphor supports the meaning. Another example is “*fine and dandy*”, what means that everything is going well. In other cases, the literal meaning does not make sense at all. For example, “*to go for an early bath*” means to lose a job or a position because things have gone wrong [2, p.73].

An idiom is a phrase, whose meaning is not predictable from the usual meaning of words which are used in it, so it can cause incomprehension if a person does not know the meaning of a whole clause, not only of the words in the idiom.

It is not really easy to learn a lot of idioms and to get used to using them in everyday speech, so it is better to study them together with context, which is suitable to the idiom, or a situation, when it can be used. If a non-native speaker manages to learn and to use idioms properly, it will definitely find regards from a native speaker. The most important is to never use an idiomatic expression in a wrong way or to change it so it loses the meaning. Then it can cause disapproval, but the worst is that your interlocutor just will not understand you. For a better understanding of the context, we will analyze the categories of idioms that can be classified into several groups:

1. Idioms are derived from the names of body parts and bodily functions:

E.g.

- *cover one's back* – **do something to protect yourself from criticism or future blame;**
- *blood, sweat, and tears* – **great personal effort;**
- *in cold blood* – **without feeling;**
- *feel (something) in one's bones* – **sense something, have an intuition about something** [5, p.33].

2. Other big group is idioms derived from animals names:

E.g.

- *as weak as a kitten* – **weak, sickly;**
- *hit the bulls-eye* – **to reach the main point of something;**
- *dog-eat-dog* – **ready or willing to fight and hurt others to get what one wants;**
- *monkey see, monkey do* – **someone copies something that someone else does** [5, p.35].

3. The third big group is idioms derived from food and preparing it:

E.g.

- *full of beans* – **to feel energetic, to be in high spirits;**
- *grist for the mill* – **something that can be used to bring advantage or profit;**
- *take the cake* – **to be the best or worst of something;**
- *cook (someone's) goose* – **to damage or ruin someone** [5, p.38].

Those are three the most common groups of idioms in English language. All these idioms are based on daily life events. They have risen from daily routine, from following the animal's behavior as well as the human's body reaction to different situations. They are often used in every day's speech and they are quite intelligible.

Other idioms are quite rare in English language. For example, politics idioms:

E.g.

- *body politics* – **A group of people organized under a single government or authority (national or regional);**
- *fifth columnist* – **a member of a subversive organization who tries to help an enemy invade;**
- *on the stump* – **politicians are campaigning for support and votes;**

One rarer group is idioms based on crimes and police as well:

- *behind bars* – **to be in prison;**
- *new sheriff in town* – **a new authority figure takes charge;**
- *after the fact* – **after something (a crime etc.) has occurred** [4, p.57].

These expressions are quite difficult to understand. For example, idiom “*new sheriff in town*” could be understood as a fact that “*a town has really got a new sheriff*”.

The category of describing people's character and appearance is not the smallest one but it is not the most common one. For our article we have chosen to analyze idioms, which describe appearance of people and their character because it is obvious that idioms describe the way people look in more vivid, diverse and full of sensation language.

E.g. “*Arty-farty*” – **someone who is boring and silly because of trying to seem connected with serious art.** [7, p.31];

E.g. “*A bright spark*” – **an intelligent person, this phrase is often used humorously to mean the opposite** [7, p.45].

In English “*to show one's true colours*”, **colours** means “*to show one's true character*” and is used to describe a person who has stopped acting falsely or pretending to be that he/she is not [3, p.69].

When we want to describe a person we can add some idiomatic expressions because it is better to describe person's appearance or character not only by using standard adjectives: tall, short, thin, handsome, attractive, funny, clever, lazy, kind and so on, but by adding interesting idioms, metaphors, similes. They make speech a way interesting and different. Also, idioms can add some nuances to the speech, for example, using right expression can show humorous attitude, irony, irritation or kindness. The best way to understand an idiom without using a dictionary is to see it in context. If someone says: “*He owns some old iron mines that have not been used in donkey's ears*”, then listener, using the context and common sense understands the meaning “*to last for a very long time*”. Here we have given some more examples of idioms and their meaning for a better description of the people's appearance:

E.g. *“Be out of the ark”* – **to be very old-fashioned;**

E.g. *“Go beetroot”* – **to become very red in face because of embarrassment;**

E.g. *“Be as brown as a berry”* – **to be suntanned;**

E.g. *“Cut a fine figure (cut a dash)”* – **if someone cuts a fine figure or a dash, people admire their appearance, usually because they are wearing attractive clothes;**

E.g. *“Be the dead spirit of somebody”* – **to look very much like someone;**

E.g. *“Like death warmed up”* – **to look very ill;**

E.g. *“Dressed up like a dog’s dinner”* – **wearing clothes which make you look silly when you have tried to dress for a formal occasion;**

E.g. *“Down-at-heel”* – **badly dressed because of a lack of money** [6, p.21].

We can observe that all the above examples add a colourful and fascinating aspect to the description of a person’s appearance. Further, we will enumerate some examples of idioms followed by their meaning, used to describe character.

E.g. *“An all rounder”* – **someone who is good at many different things;**

E.g. *“Not be backward in coming forward”* – **to be confident and always ready to express an opinion;**

E.g. *“Be barking mad”* – **to be crazy;**

E.g. *“Like a bear with a sore head”* – **to be in a bad mood which causes you to treat other people badly and complain a lot;**

E.g. *“A big-head”* – **someone who believes that they are very clever and who thinks that other people should admire them;**

E.g. *“Bloody minded”* – **someone who makes difficulties for other people by arguing against their actions or ideas without a reason;**

E.g. *“Be bone idle”* – **to be very lazy;**

E.g. *“Would not say boo to a goose”* – **very shy and nervous;**

E.g. *“A bossy boots”* – **someone who always tells other people what to do;**

E.g. *“Be as bright as a button”* – **to be intelligent and able to think quickly;**

E.g. *“Like a headless chicken”* – **to do something very quickly and without thinking;**

E.g. *“The cock of the walk”* – **a man who acts as if he is more fashionable and important than other people** [6, p.25].

There are a lot of idioms that can be used with the purpose of describing character and appearance, and they can be classified into different groups.

We can differentiate three types of idioms which express appearance and character:

1. Idioms using the full equivalent with the same lexical and grammatical meaning:

E.g.

• *early bird* – **a person who gets up very early in the morning;**

• *look like a million dollars* – **to look or feel extremely attractive;**

• *two-faced* – **a two-faced person says nice things about people when they are with them, but bad things about them to other people** [6, p.24].

2. Idioms which have some grammatical or lexical differences from original idioms but express the same meaning:

E.g.

• *beauty is but skin-deep* – **something that you say which means a person's character is more important than their appearance;**

• *out of your mind* – **unable to behave or deal with things normally because something has made you very worried, unhappy or angry;**

• *walk arm-in-arm* – **linked or hooked together by the arms** [6, p.28].

3. Idioms which correspond with meaning and stylistic orientation but do not coincide with metaphorical:

E.g.

• *down at heel* – **wearing old clothes, or in a bad condition, because of not having much money;**

• *up and coming* – **beginning to achieve success or popularity** [6, p.30].

After studying a lot of idioms, we came to the conclusion that idiomatic expressions play an important role in describing appearance and character of people. Idioms add spice to the communication discourse thus

making it more palatable. Idioms are often used by both journalists and politicians as short hand ways of expressing opinion or conveying ready-made evaluations. Idioms add spice to the communication discourse thus making it more palatable. Idioms are often used by both journalists and politicians as short hand ways of expressing opinion or conveying ready-made evaluations.

To sum up, appearance of people plays a great role in creating idioms. Turning back to history we can see that many of poets and novelists used idioms to beautify their language and make it melodious. Nowadays people began to use idioms in increasing frequency. It became an integral part of oral speech. As a result translation is becoming more and more complicated. That is why the main aim of the translator is not to translate word by word but to use his inspiration and imagination.

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