

THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL BACKGROUND OF IDIOMS

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Idioms, proverbs, and phrases in English play a significant role in everyday speech. Both in spoken and written English, they are often used. You must become familiar with each idiom's definition and application because they don't always make sense when taken literally. Even while it can seem like a lot of effort, studying idioms can be entertaining, especially when you contrast English idioms with those in your own tongue. It's a good idea to master some of these expressions since learning to use common idioms and expressions will make your English sound more native. The frequency of the idioms in American English is listed in the tables below. Since you will come across these idioms frequently when watching American movies or TV or while traveling to the United States, you can start by studying them. Move on to resting once you've mastered those. People can feel comfortable using any of the idioms on this page with native English speakers from all English-speaking nations because none of them are uncommon or out of date.

The study of idioms is generally considered problematic for the majority of linguists. In his book *Idiomatic Creativity*, Langlotz argues that “idioms are peculiar linguistic constructions that have raised many eyebrows in linguistics and often confuse newcomers to a language” [1]. They constitute a “subset of the fixed expressions in a language community” and on account of their complex nature, idioms give rise to a broad range of definitions [5]. Therefore, it is quite challenging to give a concise description of an idiom that covers all the things that fall under this classification. In addition, linguists have not yet arrived at a consensus method or viewpoint about idioms, therefore it is not feasible to provide in this book a precise definition of what an idiom is. However, an effort will be made to offer some hints as to how to define an idiom in this section of the book.

To start, the word idiom, which dates to about 1565-1575, comes from the Latin *idioma*, which means “specific attribute,” and the Greek *ἰδίωμα*–*idiōma*, which means “unique characteristic, distinctive phrase.” Idiom is described as a group of



words that have a metaphorical meaning due to their widespread usage by McArthur in *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* [2]. An idiom is defined as “a habitual collocation of two or more words whose combined meaning is not deducible from a knowledge of the meanings of its component words and of their grammatical syntagmatic relations to each other” by Meetham and Hudson in *The Encyclopaedia of Linguistics, Information and Control* from 1969 [3].

Idiomatically is not a categorical property, however, and expressions may be idiomatic to a greater or lesser degree. Some idioms (e.g. kick the bucket) are completely opaque for the average speaker while others (e.g. make good time or kick the habit) are relatively transparent. (Makkai 1972 makes a useful distinction here between idioms of encoding, which compel the speaker to conform to a particular conventionalized way of speaking but have a relatively transparent interpretation, idioms of decoding, whose meaning is not so predictable.)

Moreover, even in the case of relatively opaque idioms, there are differences in compositionality, as Nunberg observe [4]. Whereas some idioms (e.g., kick the bucket and saw logs) have a meaning that cannot be distributed over their parts, many others can be given a sort of post hoc compositional analysis once their meaning is known: in the expression pull strings, for example, the component words can each be matched metaphorically with a component of the phrase’s meaning (pull with “exploit” and strings with “connections”) : see also William [6]. Idioms also differ with regard to the substitutability of their component parts. Some idioms, especially those that are semantically opaque, allow little or no variation in the choice of lexical items. (The expressions pull strings, shoot the bull, the fat is in the fire, and kick the bucket are of this type.)

One idiom, the standard, appeared in all pairs. In one experimental condition, the standard idiom and its pair mate had similar figurative meanings and the same syntactic structures (e.g., if the standard idiom had the structure verb-determiner-noun, so did the paired idiom). In a second condition, the standard idiom and its pair mate had the same syntactic form but different figurative meanings. In the final condition, the standard idiom and its pair mate had different syntactic forms (e.g., if the standard idiom was verb-determiner-noun, then the paired idiom might have the structure preposition-determiner-noun) and different figurative meanings. We will call these respective conditions same meaning-same syntax, different meaning-same syntax, and different meaning-different syntax.

In light of the aforementioned remarks, it is important to note that a variety of figurative language, metaphors, slang phrases, and compounds were used in the



examination of the expressions. These were chosen under the straightforward stipulation that they always contain a shift in the figurative sense, and as a result, they always have at least some idiomatic meaning.

Literature Review

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