

IDIOMS AND PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS IN ENGLISH

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This article is about idioms and phraseological units in English. It explains their types, meanings, and importance in communication and language learning. The article also describes modern scientific research and technologies that help people and computers understand idioms better.

Key words: idioms, phraseological units, figurative language, communication, cognitive linguistics, Artificial Intelligence, language learning, phraseology.

Language is an important tool of communication, and vocabulary plays a major role in expressing ideas, emotions, and experiences. Among different vocabulary units, idioms and phraseological units are especially important because they make speech more natural, expressive, and interesting. Native speakers use them in everyday conversations, books, movies, songs, and social media. Because of this, understanding idioms is very important for English learners who want to communicate fluently and understand real-life English.

Idioms are fixed expressions whose meanings are different from the literal meanings of the individual words. People usually cannot understand idioms by translating every word separately because idioms have figurative meanings. ¹For example, the expression “break the ice” means to start communication in a friendly way, while “spill the beans” means to reveal a secret. These expressions are commonly used in spoken English and make conversations sound more natural and emotional.

Phraseological units are stable combinations of words that function as one meaningful expression. Idioms are one type of phraseological unit, but phraseology also includes collocations, proverbs, and fixed expressions. ²Linguists explain that people often communicate using ready-made phrases instead of creating completely new expressions every time. This makes communication faster and more natural.

There are different types of phraseological units in English. Phraseological fusions are expressions whose meanings are completely different from the meanings of the individual words. Phraseological unities are partly figurative and partly connected to their direct meanings. Phraseological collocations are common combinations of words that are regularly used together in communication.

Some common idioms and phraseological units used in English are:

Break the ice — to start communication in a friendly way.

Spill the beans — to reveal a secret.

Piece of cake — something very easy.

Hit the books — to study hard.

Under the weather — feeling sick.

¹ Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.

² Cowie, A. P. (1998). *Phraseology: Theory, analysis, and applications*. Oxford University Press.

Idioms and phraseological units are important because they improve communication and help speakers express emotions, humor, and opinions more effectively. A person who understands idioms can communicate more confidently and understand native speakers more easily. Idioms are also important in literature and media because writers and journalists use them to make speech more vivid and expressive.

Modern scientific research has shown that idioms are closely connected with human thinking and memory. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explained that many idioms are based on conceptual metaphors and everyday human experiences. For example, expressions like “time is money” show how people connect abstract ideas with daily life. Their research proved that idioms are not random language expressions but important parts of human thinking.

Another important researcher is Raymond W. Gibbs, who studied how people understand idioms during communication. His experiments showed that familiar idioms are usually understood immediately as complete expressions. For example, when native speakers hear “spill the beans,” they usually understand the figurative meaning instantly instead of thinking about the direct meaning of the words.

Scientists also used modern technologies such as fMRI and EEG to study how the brain processes idiomatic language. Their research showed that idioms activate language and memory areas of the brain.³ Familiar idioms are often stored in memory as whole units, which helps people understand them more quickly. Modern technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Natural Language Processing also study idioms and phraseological units. Earlier computer translation systems often translated idioms incorrectly because they translated each word separately.

Today, AI systems use machine learning and context analysis to recognize figurative meanings more accurately. This improves translation programs, voice assistants, and chatbots.⁴ Educational research shows that students learn idioms more effectively through context and practice rather than memorization alone. Teachers often use stories, conversations, games, videos, and role plays to teach idioms naturally. Researchers also recommend grouping idioms by topic. For example:

A. Food idioms:

Piece of cake

Spill the beans

Bring home the bacon

B. Weather idioms:

Under the weather

Storm in a teacup

C. Animal idioms:

Let the cat out of the bag

A dark horse

Idioms are also connected with culture and history. Many English idioms originated from sports, agriculture, literature, and sailing. For example, “learn the ropes” originally came from

³ Crystal, D. (2003). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of the English language*. Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Gibbs, R. W. (1994). *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge University Press.

sailing, where sailors learned how to work with ropes on ships. The idiom “hit below the belt” comes from boxing. These examples show that idioms preserve historical and cultural information.

Overall, idioms and phraseological units are very important parts of the English language. They make communication more natural, expressive, and culturally meaningful. Modern scientific studies continue to show that idioms are connected with thinking, memory, communication, and culture. Because of this, idioms remain an important topic in linguistics, education, psychology, and Artificial Intelligence research.

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