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## THE ROLE OF IDIOMS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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### Abstract

This article explores the significant role that idioms play in the English language and communication as a whole. Idioms are more than just common phrases — they are expressions that capture the culture, history, and mindset of English-speaking communities. Through idioms, we gain insight into how people think, feel, and interpret the world around them. For instance, expressions like “a blessing in disguise” or “hit the nail on the head” reveal the creativity and practicality often found in English-speaking cultures. Understanding idioms is therefore crucial for language learners, as it not only enhances their vocabulary and comprehension but also helps them sound more natural and confident in conversation. Learning idioms allows learners to connect more deeply with the cultural essence of the language and to communicate with greater fluency and authenticity.

**Keywords:** Idioms, figurative meaning, English language, culture, communication.

English is considered to be not only the most popular and demandable language in the world but also one of the most beautiful languages. Moreover, the English language is particularly rich in lexis. Without doubt, idioms play a great role in the enrichment of the English language. Idioms represent unique cultural and historical information as well as broaden people’s understanding and manipulation of English. Native speakers use idioms to make their speech more colorful and alive. That is why it is definitely important for non-native speakers to learn not only grammar and new lexical units as well as acquire reading, listening and writing skills but also pay attention to idioms in the process of English language learning.

An idiom can be defined as a combination of two or more words which function together as a single unit of meaning. Idioms often convey meanings that cannot be



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deduced from the literal interpretation of their individual components. They enrich the language by adding color, imagery, and expressiveness to communication.

Idioms can take different grammatical forms. For instance, they may appear as noun phrases (the wind of change, bad blood, a nervous wreck), as predicates (have a frog in one's throat, have second thoughts, pull strings, scream blue murder), or even as complete sentences (the early bird catches the worm, don't cry over spilt milk). Another common form is phrasal verbs, which combine a verb and an adverbial particle (look up, come up with).

The area of idioms is subject to gradience in various respects. First of all, idioms differ in their lexical stability. For example, have a screw loose can appear in slightly different versions such as got a screw loose or with a screw loose. Similarly, idioms like get a good press have variants such as get a bad press, get a fair deal, or get a square deal.

Secondly, idioms can be used in shortened forms. For instance, the expression the early bird catches the worm can be reduced to simply early bird in everyday usage, while still keeping the original meaning of being proactive or punctual.

Thirdly, idioms differ in the extent to which they allow syntactic modification. For example, scratch one's head can appear in sentences like He was scratching his head over the problem, showing that certain idioms can be adapted grammatically without losing their figurative meaning.

This flexibility and variability demonstrate that idioms are not completely fixed expressions but exist along a continuum of form and meaning — a phenomenon that linguists refer to as the gradient nature of idioms.

### Levels of Idiomaticity

Idioms can be divided into three main levels according to their transparency and flexibility.

#### a) Opaque Idioms

These idioms are difficult to understand because their meanings are not related to the literal meaning of the words.

Example: Kick the bucket → means to die.



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### **b) Semi-Transparent Idioms**

In these idioms, the meaning can be partly guessed from the literal meaning of the words.

Example: Break the ice → means to make people feel more comfortable in conversation.

### **c) Transparent Idioms**

These idioms are easy to understand because their figurative meaning is close to the literal one.

Example: See the light → means to understand something clearly.

Idioms are not just fixed phrases; they exist on a continuum from literal to figurative. This gradient nature makes idioms both challenging and fascinating.

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