

УДК 81'276

Yankouskaya A., Slesarenok E.

The Value of Idioms

Belarusian National Technical University

Minsk, Belarus

Have you ever met such expressions as couch potato, fat cat and rolling stone? Would you like to understand them and use in your speech or you don't even see the sense in it? Well, I'm here to open the tiny universe of one of the most interesting part of language – idioms.

In fact, idioms are a feature of each language. They represent a very interesting category of stable verbal combinations that often have semantic meanings that are completely different from the meanings of the words they consist of. Sometimes we can guess an idea of an idiom, nevertheless some idioms will remain a mystery unless their meaning is explored. Actually, translations of idioms as translations of proverbs, sayings from one language to another, often represent finding just expressions that are close in meaning. An important fact which must be mentioned is that idioms are not only colloquial expressions, as many people believe. They can appear in formal style and in slang. They can appear in poetry or in the language of Shakespeare and the Bible. Idioms seem often strange and inexplicable, but if you find out a little about their origin, then everything falls into place. For example, well known to everyone idiom “to break the ice”. It means “to initiate social interchanges and conversation”. Previously, when road transport wasn't developed, the only way to transport goods over long distances was ships. During the winter, they were constantly stuck on the way, because in some places the water was covered with an ice

crust. In order to solve this problem, small vessels were sent from the recipient country, which broke the ice so that the ship with the goods could sail to the destination without obstacles. This gesture demonstrated the establishment of good relations and mutual understanding between the two territories.

The next one is also a popular idiom “rain cats and dogs”. There are many assumptions about the occurrence of this idiom. In the 16th century, when modern architecture was far away, the roofs of houses were covered with straw, which made them attractive for cats and dogs (this material retained heat better). During heavy rains, the animals slipped and fell down, and the British began to associate heavy rain with falling cats and dogs.

If you hear two Englishmen talk about the weather, don't be so sure that they are talking about it. Thus, next idioms are the confirmation of this: face like thunder – to be in a bad mood; storm in a teacup – much ado about nothing; lightning-fast – very fast; to have one's head in the clouds – to dream; to be under the weather – to be sick [1].

As in any other language, the meaning of idioms in English is often not clear at first glance and lies somewhere under the surface of a web of interlacing cultures and centuries (and sometimes thousands of years) of the formation of a language. You must carefully and individually examine the meaning of each expression. It seems that this is a difficult and long process, but diving into a world of steadily obscure meanings is fun. Especially when the native statements are connected to the case and the comparison begins.

Knowledge of idioms expands vocabulary and makes speech more diverse and lively. Idioms are actively used in everyday speech and relevant in various styles. However, studying idioms is not only useful for expanding vocabulary. They reflect the nature of the language, retain the information about the mentality. It is a source of knowledge about culture

and traditions, and possession of idioms helps to think like a native speaker.

The English have a lot of time-related idioms, so I couldn't ignore this fact and gathered the most common ones: once in a blue moon – rarely; the big time – the big success; around the clock – all day and all night; run out of time – to have less and less time; in the blink of an eye – in an instant; like clockwork – without interruption; to give someone a hard time – to criticize someone; to catch unawares – surprise somebody [2].

Idioms are created in order to diversify our speech, to make it "tasty", more emotional and, as it seems to me, to add more humor to the routine. Both in fairy tales and fables, human character traits are attributed to animals, so it is not surprising that there are many idioms with animals that most often reflect people of a certain behavior, character, class. In order to have an application in life, idioms must relate to those things and situations that a person meets almost every day. For example: monkey business – killing the time; smell a rat – suspect that something is wrong; cash cow – a business or investment that generates a large or consistent profit; eager beaver – someone who is very enthusiastic; elephant in the room – an obvious truth or fact; when pigs fly – never, it won't happen; like a cat on a hot tin roof – to be anxious and unable to sit still or relax; to let a cat out of the bag – to share information that was previously concealed; to eat like a horse – to eat large quantities of food [3].

To continue the theme of food, let's find out the origin of the idiom "to be full of beans". This idiom has appeared in the world of British entertainment, horse racing. Earlier beans were the most expensive and difficult-to-get feed for horses, which at the same time gave a large amount of energy, so the horse on such a diet was more likely to win the race. Therefore, this idiom means to be very energetic.

The English often do not take thoughts about food literally. These idioms will tell you more about it: egghead – an intellectual person; bad apple – one bad person who has a bad effect on others in a group; hard nut to crack – difficult problem or person to deal with; as cool as a cucumber – very calm, untroubled by stress; to sell like hot cakes – be sold quickly and in large quantities; to take something with a pinch of salt – not believe everything somebody says; to bite off more than one can chew – to take more than one can deal with; to cry over spilt milk – complain about a loss from the past [4].

To draw the conclusion, learning to use common idioms and expressions will make your English sound more native, so it's a good idea to master some of these expressions. Idioms in fact, evolve the language; they are the building blocks of a language and civilization. Idioms bring a spectacular illustration to everyday speech. They provide interesting insights into the use of words, languages and the thought processes of their speakers. They have a sense of mystery and fun about them. Moreover, mastering common idioms will add your speech naturalness and beauty. Significant incentive to spend time and effort, isn't it?

References:

1. Lingvistov [Electronic resource]. – Mode of access: <http://www.lingvistov.ru/blog/expressions> – Date of access: 15.03.2019.
2. Idioms. The free dictionary [Electronic resource]. – Mode of access: <https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com>. – Date of access: 18.03.2019.
3. The idioms [Electronic resource]. – Mode of access: <https://www.theidioms.com>. – Date of access: 20.03.2019.
4. English boost [Electronic resource]. – Mode of access: <https://englishboost.ru>. – Date of access: 22.03.2019.