

## **Effective Communication through Idioms**

**K.MURALI**

**Assistant Professor of English**

**Sridevi Women's Engineering College**

**Vattinagulapally near Gandipet**

**Hyderabad**

**Telangana State**

**India**

“Communication is a skill that you can learn. It's like riding bicycle or typing. If you're willing to work at it, you can rapidly improve the quality of every part of your life”.

-Brain Tracy

### **Abstract**

If we want to communicate effectively, we need many elements verbal and nonverbal. In the verbal communication, we should know about the grammar, vocabulary. Without vocabulary it would be impossible to communicate in English. All the time we may not communicate only by content words and phrasal verbs, sometimes we have to use idioms. Idioms are an important part of language, since they are used to convey our feelings in more concise and effective way. Language as a zone of communication has literal and figurative meanings, while literal meaning is the direct reference of words or sentences to objects, figurative sense is used for giving invective portraiture or distinctive effect. Such a meaning characterizes notions like

metaphors, similes, proverbs and idioms. Idioms, as means of non-literal language, have a vital extent use in functional language. In this paper I examine various dimensions of idioms and analysis. Carrying out these into consideration, the present paper aims at highlighting few dimensions regarding how idioms are connected to one's feelings, how one can communicate effectively through idioms.

**Key words: invective, notion, metaphor, simile, portratur.**

## INTRODUCTION

According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English (1974), “idiom” refers to “phrase or sentence whose meaning is not obvious through knowledge of the individual meanings of the constituent words but must be learnt as a whole, e.g. ring a bell, fed up, get out of hand, and so on.”

An idiom is a group of words in a fixed order whose meaning is different from the meanings of each word, for example ‘a cold fish’ means to a person who doesn’t seem very friendly and doesn’t show their emotions. The meanings of idioms have become fixed through use, and they have to be learned through reading and by looking up their meanings in a dictionary.

English and Indians are both productive with idioms. Idioms reflect national features personify in a language and are prospered in customs and habits that characterize a society. Lots of cultural knowledge is personified in idioms. We can communicate effectively through idioms as it reflects nation’s culture. Though the syntax of the idioms may be different, the meaning and theme is the same in both countries. e.g. crying over spilt milk means repenting the same is conveyed in Indian (Hindi) language differently.

Idioms are used commonly to enfold a resolve evaluation or effective manner toward the things they indicate. Idioms are not used commonly by a language to describe the situations, which are regarded neutrally-reading novels, watching TV, buying things. The worth of using idioms is in the communication in which the activities were sufficiently charged with societal needs like in trade, education, health and so on.

Idioms are not only a part of language, but also they are the part of universal communication. We use idioms for theoretical purposes, and if we categorise idioms, they can be used in different ways for different purposes. Whatever it may be definitions of idioms don’t produce a class that conforms more or less well to general understanding. We can know the theme of idiom in sentence, which is used by the writer or speaker.

If we want to better understand and use it in our communication, we shouldn't depend only on the definitions, we should analyse the idioms into different categories in terms of structure whether they are related to animals, similes, metaphors etc. Here I categorise the idioms according to their structure and how better we understand and communicate through this analysis.

### **IDIOMS ARE DIFFERENT KINDS IN TERMS OF THEIR STRUCTURE:**

1. Those that are “string of adverbs”, e.g. left, right and centre (everywhere)
2. Those consisting of “a simile” e.g. fit as fiddle (in good physical health)
3. Those that are sentences (aphorisms), e.g. Birds of a feather flock together (similar people tend to spend time with each other)
4. Cultural & historical idioms e.g. Achilles heel (a fatal weakness inspite of overall strength)
5. Those consisting of “a mephorical” e.g. the words are clear as crystal (expresses similarity between the words and crystal in the degree of quality)
6. Animal idioms e.g. wild goose chase (mad adventure)
7. Anger idioms e.g. add fuel to the fire (making the bad situation worse)
8. Those consisting of “a preposition and noun phrase”, e.g. on the tip of your tongue (used to say you are almost able to remember something but you can't)
9. Colour idioms e.g. black and white (in writing)
10. Entertainment idioms e.g. pay through nose (pay very high price for it)
11. Food and drink idioms e.g. the icing on the cake (an additional thing that makes something good become great)

12. Health and illness idioms e.g. under the weather (feeling ill and sad)
13. Music e.g. blow one's own trumpet (boasting about their talent and achievements)
14. Parts of body. e.g. open with arms (welcoming earnestly)
15. Food e.g. curate's egg (it is only good in parts)
16. Numbers e.g. a fool at 40 is a fool forever (if someone hasn't matured by the time they reach 40, they will never)
17. Those consisting of "a verb and object", e.g. speak to your mind (say what you feel honestly)
18. War and conflict e.g. an axe to grind (have a grievance, a resentment and you want to get revenge or sort it out)
19. Clothes e.g. Big girl's blouse (a person who is very weak)
20. Building and constructions e.g. buy the farm (represents death)
21. Place name e.g. cut the Gordian's knot (solve very complex problem in a simple way)
22. Hunting e.g. fair game (it is acceptable to target, criticise or attack them)
23. Sports e.g. big hitter (commands a lot of respect and is very important in their field)
24. Religion e.g. cold day in the religion (this is used as a prediction there is no chance some event or condition will never happen)
25. Time e.g. eleventh hour (it happens right at the last minute)
26. Those that are "compounds", e.g. the ins and outs (to know all aspects of something; to know completely how something works)
27. Person's name e.g. Tom Dick, Harry (common knowledge)
28. Nature e.g. hung The Moon (extremely wonderful, or amazing, or good)

29. Clothes e.g. I'll eat my hat (absolutely sure, there is no chance of wrong)
30. Furniture and house hold fittings e.g. In his cups (someone is drunk)
31. Plants and flowers e.g. Make hay (take the advantage of an opportunity, don't waste time)
32. Money e.g. make money hand over fist (make lot of money without any difficulty)
33. Men and women e.g. Man of his word ( keeps his promises)
34. Body and bodily functions e.g. A fresh pair of eyes (a person who is brought into examine something carefully)
35. Police and crime e.g. A steal (it costs much less than it is really worth)
36. Number e.g. sixes and sevens (confusion, disorder)
37. Gambling e.g. ace in the hole (not aware of that can be used to one's advantage when time is right)
38. Profession and work e.g. Agony aunt (newspaper columnist who gives advice to people to having problems, especially personal one's)
39. Food e.g. alike as two peas (identical)
40. Technology and science e.g. All singing, all dancing (latest version with the most up-to-date features)
41. Fruits e.g. apples and oranges (completely different)
42. Sex and Sexuality e.g. old flame (somebody has had an emotional passionate, relationship with someone)
43. Travel and Transport e.g. climb on the bandwagon (doing something because it is popular and everyone else is doing it)
44. String of adjectives e.g. cool, calm and collected (relaxed, not nervous)

45. Law e.g. Ambulance chaser (a lawyer who encourages people who been in accidents )

The above structure of the idioms makes easy to guess the meaning, if it is used in a sentence. For example the idioms which are related to the nature like the sun, the moon, the sky. e.g once in blue Moon, blue Moon means the second full moon in the same month, does it occur regularly? No it occurs rarely, hence we use “once in blue moon” for the rarest things. And the fruits “apples and oranges” though both are fruits, they are related to different species, so we use it as “completely different” in meaning.

Idioms appear in all languages and speakers use them to communicate ideas clearly and effectively. Using and decoding idiomatic expressions helps non-native speakers sound more fluent and helps them in understanding others more efficiently. If we want to use them effectively, we should learn them by the categorization for example whether they are related to animals or similes etc... All the time we may not read all the idioms, so we have to guess the meaning in the sentence by its origin. Even some of the idioms are used in distinct fields e.g. “in banking” we use open a bank account, take out a loan, pay in cash, pay by cheque, on credit charge, in “business field”, we use some idioms like, a sole trader (a single person who runs a business), a sleeping partner, go bankrupt (who can't pay debts), “in buying and selling”, we use idioms like, shop around (compare prices at different shops), go window-shopping (only look at the goods in the shop window), “in politics and law”, we use, be in power, lose his seat, be defeated, hold office, “in telephoning”, give someone a ring, make a business call, get through, hold on the line, “in travel”, go on a holiday, set off on a journey, make an overnight stop, travel first class, charter flight, through customs, “in health, illness”, catch a cold, pass away, catch a disease, to feel under the cold weather. We can communicate well if we want to make others better understand.

In some senses, idioms are the images of environment, life, historical culture etc., of the speakers and are closely associated with their innermost spirits and feelings. “Idioms usually carry more effect than non-idiomatic expressions because of their close identification with a particular language and culture.” For one thing, most idioms, though composed of few words, contain an

extremely profound and rich meaning, for example most idioms carry a vivid image. All the time we can't translate the native sentences into English, we should convey those feelings by using idioms. No two words in any two languages are completely same in meaning. The same meaning is conveyed in different languages with different syntaxes.

Since idioms are figurative expressions that do not mean what they literally state and since they are so frequent in spoken and written discourse, e.g. to keep one's nose clean means to be in safe side without committing mistakes, understanding and producing them present foreign learners with a special vocabulary training problem (Cooper, 1999). Therefore, it would appear that for second language learners to become more fluent in the target language, just a good command of grammar and vocabulary is not enough? Idioms reflect the language used daily by the native speakers of target language.

Prodromou (2003) claims that in the past, teachers relied heavily on grammar and dictionaries to help them teach but these were not based on a naturally occurring language.

Liontas (2002) argues that idioms should be introduced to learners as early as possible along with other aspects of semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, culture and conventions of discourse. He also claims that idioms should not be separated from other aspects of learning a language. In short, idioms should be integrated into the language curriculum right from the start.

#### Conclusion:

This research paper is discussed how we can better communicate using idioms. The frequent, spontaneous and appropriate use of idioms is usually a mark of good English, and indicator of native and near native mastery of the language, usage of idioms in communication makes the speaker effective communicator. For that one should learn and use through categorization of idioms. If we don't know the meaning completely, we can guess through analysis of idioms. Idioms are beautiful expressions, because we can convey vague expression making it more understandable and clear. Idioms are special expressions which are almost known and agreed by all members of community. Idioms are linguistic symbols which most vividly reflect the culture of a nation and its people. This paper makes a research on the analysis of idioms to use them in



one's communication effectively and how the categorization makes easier to guess the meaning to use it in communication.

**Acknowledgement:**

The author, K.Murali is thankful to Sridevi Women's Engineering College Principal, Dr B.L.Malleshwari and HOD of S&H Dept, Mr.K.C.Ravi Kumar for their encouragement in publishing the paper.

## References

1. Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current English (1974)
2. Nida Eugene A. (2001) language and culture: contexts in Translating: Shangai Foreign Language Education Press, 28-40
3. Idioms online dictionary
4. Fernando, C Idioms and Idiomacity. Penguin books, 1996. Print
5. Makkai, A Idiom structure in English
6. Yoshikava. H (2008). International intelligibility in world English: focusing on idiomatic expressions, international Communication studies.
7. Dixon.R.J. (1994). Essential Idioms in English, Newjersy, prentice Hall Regents.
8. Lennon.P. (1998). Approaches to the teaching of idiomatic language.
9. Prodromou.L (2003). The idiomatic paradox and English as lingua franca: Developing an idiomatic common core. Modern English Teacher.
10. Liontas.J.I. (2002). Context and Idiom understanding in second languages. EUROSALA Yearbook
11. Shiping Luo. (2006). A Research on English Idioms. Shangai Foreign Language Education Press.
12. Gibbs, R.Nayak, & Cutting C (1989). How to Kick the bucket and not decompose.