

## THE ORIGIN AND MEANING OF ENGLISH ANIMALISTIC IDIOMS

Науковий вісник Ужгородського університету. Серія: Філологія.

Випуск 1 (43)

УДК 811.111'373.72

DOI:10.24144/2663-6840/2020.1(43).237–244

**Положин І.** The origin and meaning of English animalistic idioms; кількість бібліографічних джерел – 16; мова англійська.

**Abstract.** The article deals with the origin and meaning of English animalistic idioms. The author proposes the definition to the concept of idiom as a sequence of words with special integral meaning that differs from the sense of its constituents. This meaning cannot be deduced from the semantic components of words, constituting the idiom. A number of varieties of idiomatic phrases are given in the article. A contextological approach to the definition of their meaning is substantiated.

**The topicality of the study theme.** As animalistic idioms were not the subject-matter of a separate investigation, that is so far one does not know which concrete names of living creatures actively participate in forming idioms, the contents of the article are concentrated on filling this gap.

**The empirical material under study.** For obtaining as precise data as possible 100 most frequently used idioms, enclosing a great number of living creature names regardless of their space displacement, have been analyzed. Each of the idioms under consideration is accompanied with a definition and short excursus into the history of its origin.

**The aim** of writing the article is obtaining and making more precise semantic information about each of the animalistic idioms that make up dictionary entries.

The following **modern methods** of linguistic investigation have been applied: phraseological identification, the description and analysis of dictionary definitions with selective references to lexicographic and literary sources, which give meaning variants of some animalistic idioms.

**The results** of the given study convincingly prove the availability of keen interest, exhibited by the English ethnos, to the upper appearance, way of life and typical behavior of living creatures, the names of which entailed the formation of animalistic idioms. Categorization of the idioms under investigation has also been proposed that is based on the ability of a certain name of a living creature to form one or more animalistic idioms, that is, to reveal its phraseological potency.

The subject-matter of further study may be a comparative aspect of animalistic idiomaticity in closely and distantly related languages.

**Keywords:** idiom, animalistic, phraseological potency, set phrase, phrasing, locution.

**Problem statement.** According to the current linguistic opinion an idiom is a group of words that has a special meaning that is different from its separate words, e. g., *'under the weather'* is an idiomatic phrase meaning *'ill'* [Longman Dictionary 2003, p. 305]. In other words, idiomatic phrases refer to the combination of two or more words that have a particular meaning that cannot be guessed from the senses of each isolated word, e. g., *'full of beans'* is an idiom which means *'lively and energetic'* [Longman Language 2002, p. 1376]. Hence, idioms include expressions, (set) phrases, phrasings, locutions, clichés, e. g., the term *'red herring'* is an idiom, meaning *'false trail'*. It is used of something that is neither red nor a herring, but *a side issue to divert attention from the main question* [Laurence Urdang 1995, p. 244].

**Analysis of the previous research.** Besides that, idiomatic phrases are fixed expressions, whose meaning is not immediately obvious from individual words they consist of. The above mentioned examples testify to the fact, that an idiom as a form of expression peculiar to a language and approved by its usage often has a different grammatical or logical signification. Therefore it is a combination of words with a special meaning that cannot be inferred from its separate parts, being the most recalcitrant to translation and causing conspicuous difficulties to foreign learners [Speake 2000, preface].

There are the following varieties of idiomatic phrases in English: clause, noun phrase, verb phrase,

prepositional phrase, adverbial phrase and adjectival phrase. An idiom may also include: expression, word group, collocation, locution, idiom, idiomatic expression, collocation, catch, phrase, adage, maxim, axiom, proverb, motto, slogan, saying, sawder, colloquialism, cliché, platitude, commonplace [Speake 2000, p. 388]. The best way to obtain an adequate idea about them is through applying contextual analysis [see: Amosova 2010].

The **relevance** of the present article is to fill in the gap of knowledge concerning the meaning of animalistic idioms in Modern English and give a brief information of their origin.

**Research aim and objectives.** One of the **main aims** in writing article is to give the as much interesting background material as possible on the constituents of animalistic idioms together with the stories associated with them.

Some of these stories may appear incredible but the truth is, after all, stranger than fiction. Therefore the **innovation** of the article is in demonstrating an embodiment of mere animal propensities in English idiom formations.

**Methods and methodology.** The **methods** of phraseological identification, description and analysis of dictionary definitions have been used in learning the origin as well as specification of meaning of 100 most frequently used English animalistic idioms [see: Кунин 10, c. 35–42].

The **subject-matter** of the article is dwelling upon animalistic idioms from the point of view of their origin and meaning as fixed up in different dictionary definitions [see: Porov, Balla 2005; Neil 1983; Mc Carthy Michael, O'Dell Felicity 2003; The Compact Edition 1971].

**An albatross around one's neck** refers to the guilt one has to bear for a long time for something he/she has done wrong.

**Material description.** According to nautical superstition, it was considered unlucky to kill albatrosses as these birds were believed to embody the souls of departed mariners. Coleridge's well-known poem *The Ancient Mariner*, first published in 1798, tells the story of a sailor who kills an albatross. When this brings bad luck to his ship, the dead bird is hung round his neck by his shipmates as a sign of his guilt. Although he repents and is eventually forgiven, his conscience continues to distress him. The albatross remains with him in spirit, his guilt weighs heavily on him, like a lead weight around his neck, even though he goes from land to land warning others against a cruelty of killing God's creatures;

*All his geese are swans.* Ordinary people and things as well as events, he or she has to do with, are regarded as remarkable. The goose (at all events when domesticated) is a bird lacking outstanding appearance; the swan (at all events when in water) is the most graceful of birds. The idiom is recorded as far back as in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621);

*to beard the lion (or a person)* – resolutely approach a person, especially a superior, with a demand. The origin of the use of the verb 'to beard' with the meaning of 'defy', 'openly oppose' is obscure;

*to beat (or flog) a dead horse* – pursue an argument (especially a destructive one) when the matter is settled and there is nothing more to discuss. The allusion seems to be to a person who, when his horse falls down, continues to beat it not realizing it is dead and that nothing more is to be got out of it;

*an eager beaver* is used to describe anyone who is exceptionally keen and industrious, or who volunteers to undertake all manners of jobs. Beavers are among the most intelligent and hard working of animals as well as being remarkable 'engineers' to build dams, houses, canals, and cut down trees. Standing on their hind legs, they are able to reach up and gnaw round and round the trunk of a tree with their sharp incisor teeth until the tree, is ready to fall. Then they set to work lopping off the branches and cutting the trunk into conveniently sized lengths which they can drag into the water to build a dam. They do this by anchoring the trunks across the stream and then building up alternate layers of mud, stones and timber until a dam is high enough. The dam not only serves to ensure sufficient water in which to transport the logs, but also as a protection to secure the house (known as their 'lodge' and food store from predators. The lodge is made in the same way as the dam with wood, mud and stones and has two underwater passages and doorways leading to a conveniently sized main accommodation room and second area which serves as the food store or larder;

*to have a bee in one's bonnet, a busy bee.* *Queen bee, the bee's knees, to make a beeline.* As the honey-bee has always been important to man, it is not surprising that it should be the subject of many everyday phrases and expressions. The effect of having a stinging bee trapped under one's bonnet, or hat can well be imagined. *To have a bee in one's bonnet* is to be crazed or obsessed with some idea or subject which fully occupies the mind so that one cannot stop thinking or talking about it. Of course, these ideas may seem quite irrational to others;

Honey-bees are incredible insects. Those in the colony of a domestic hive work hard for the benefit of the entire colony, numbering around 60,000. The hive itself, with its honeycomb structure, is a masterpiece of architecture. The work in building, maintaining and using it, gathering nectar, pollinating flowers and making honey and wax calls for the maximum effort in the shortest possible time. Hence the idioms '*as busy as a bee*' and '*a busy bee*' describe extremely active persons;

On Royal Air Force Stations the chief WAAF (now the WRAF) is called the *QUEEN BEE* by all male and female personnel – the phrase originating during World War II.

The origin of the phrase '*the bee's knees*' is obscure but probably connected with the fact they have pollen containers on their legs. For, when they seek the nectar in flowers, pollen rubs off on their bodies. To remove it, they clean it off with their legs for storage in special pollen baskets, which are located on the outside surface of their rear legs, ready to be carried back to the hive. The process of removal involves much bending of the knees and is carried out with great precision – it is possible that the expression came about as a result of this. 'The bee's knees' is not generally a description of one person by another, but is used to describe someone who considers himself to be 'the bee's knees' because they are so clever.

Anyone who *makes a beeline* for something is acting like a bee in going in a straight line towards something (the hive) or whatever they are intent on reaching. The bees are the real 'bee's knees' because their expertise in navigation, when going from one point to another, makes use of the sun and the pattern of light in the sky, and built-in corrections allowing for the movement of the sun, enable them to keep heading in the right direction. Then, a *bee line* is literally 'a direct, straight, shortest line between two places'. Figuratively, in conversation, dissension, etc.: 'immediate, direct, approach to, or raising of a point';

*to bell the cat* is to a risk and face danger for the common good. The phrase arose from the fable in which some mice got together and suggested that a bell should be put round a cat's neck so that they would have prior warning of danger when it approached. Although, all the mice agreed that it was a good idea, none had the courage to do it himself, though it would be for the benefit of them all;

*a big bug* – 'a person of importance'. It is connected etymologically with not 'bug', being the same as 'bogy', which now survives otherwise in 'bugbear';  
*a bird of passage* – 'a person who is at a given

place, or in a given country, only temporarily; or a person who is constantly moving about without a settled home'. The allusion is to migratory birds;

*a black sheep* – 'the one worthless member, the bad lot of a family or, sometimes, of a group of people; or in a still more general application, a worthless person'. A flock of sheep sometimes includes one with a black fleece. From this comes the sense in the figurative phrase that the person concerned is an exception. The idea of his or her being worthless may be connected with the fact that a sheep with black fleece is less valuable than those with white fleeces; but perhaps it may come from a sort of play on the word 'black', which is often used in the sense of morally bad, e. g.: 'a black crime', 'a black record', 'black ingratitude';

*to cast pearls before swine* – 'do things for people, or give or offer them things (especially in the sphere of sentiment, affection, the arts), that they are incapable of appreciating. The phrase comes from the Bible;

*to cast sheep's eyes* – cast amorous glances of a half-furtive sort. A sheep generally looks sideways. The phrase has also the implication of awkwardness, shyness, embarrassment, that 'sheepishness' and 'sheepish' bear;

*a cat has nine lives*. The ancient Egyptians tamed cats more than 3,000 years ago and treated them as members of their families. When a pet cat died they embalmed it before burial and the family went into mourning. To kill a cat was a crime punishable by death. With such care and protection bestowed on them, cats were unlikely to die prematurely and their natural instincts for survival in situations where most other animals would perish brought about the belief that they had nine lives;

*a cat's paw* – a person used as 'a tool' by another. The allusion is to a fable about a money that wished to get some chestnuts from the fire without burning itself, and used the paw of a cat;

*to let the cat out of the bag* – divulge a secret especially inadvertently. Country folk going to market would sometimes put a cat in a bag (or poke) that they pretended held a sucking-pig, hoping to impose this on a greenhorn who would buy it without examination; but if the intending buyer opened the bag, the trick was disclosed;

*to rain cats and dogs* – rain heavily. Cats and dogs, notorious for their hostility to one another – scratching and biting, hissing and growling, create an uproar that becomes a metaphor for a heavy downpour of rain. The first recorded use of the expression goes back two hundred years;

*to see how the cat jumps* – wait until one finds what happens in connection with some matter before making a decision what course to take. The expression is often used with reference to a politician refusing to commit himself to the formation of his policy until public opinion has declared itself. It is not much more than a hundred years old;

*sick as a cat; sick as a dog* – extremely sick. In these similes 'sick' means 'vomiting'. The dog and cat, being our chief animal friends, are the two animals whose behavior is most familiar to us, but there are no grounds for imagining that they are more violently sick

than other animals. (There is a verb 'cat' used colloquially to mean 'vomit');

*to grin like Cheshire cat*. The phrase was popular long before Lewis Carroll's Alice encountered the cat in Wonderland, which vanished slowly until all she could see was its grin.

'Cheshire' comes into the saying because the English country's cheeses were once marked with the head of a cat. But the meaning of the saying has nothing to do with the story of Alice, or with a cheese as the 'cat' was a man and the original saying was 'grin like a Cheshire Catering'. This was the name of one of Richard III's forest rangers, 500 years ago, who was a skilled swordsman and not only a terrifying individual for poachers and others to come across, but also a man with a huge, hideous grin. During subsequent years catering became shortened to 'cat' and continued to be used in everyday speech;

*a cock and bull story* is a long rambling tale which is incredible that few are prepared to believe it. The origin of the phrase is thought by some to come from the old fables in which cocks, bulls and other animals conversed in human language. But another suggestion is that it has been handed down from the old coaching days, when gossip and stories heard in one inn, the Cock, and were retold in another nearby inn, the Bull, and exaggerated in the process;

*cock of the walk* – head, chief, an important person. 'Walk' is a name given to the enclosure in which poultry is allowed to run freely;

*to live like fighting cocks* – have ample and excellent food. In the days of cock-fighting (made illegal in 1849) the fighting cock were highly fed to make them more pugnacious and strong;

*as bald as a coot = Crazy as a coot*. The common coot has a white bill which extends to form conspicuous white plate on the forehead, which has given it the name of 'bald coot'. The phrase of the 15 th century origin, arose from a bald-headed appearance which is particularly prominent against its sooty black plumage.

Coots are shy birds normally preferring quiet ponds and more isolated areas, but in winter they can often be seen in large numbers on lakes, reservoirs and estuaries. They tend to squabble and fly at one another for no apparent reason which accounts for the other phrase 'as crazy as a coot', used to describe anyone who behaves in an odd and erratic manner;

*when the cows come home* – 'never'. It is not a fact that cows, when the time comes for them to be milked, fail of their own accord to return from their grazing ground; but they meander extremely slowly to the milking shed, and, even when driven, they will not let themselves to be hurried;

*to count one's chickens before they are hatched*. With overconfidence make plans depending on events that may not happen. The elusion is to a fable by Aesop of a market woman who said she would sell her eggs, buy a goose, grow rich, then buy a cow, and so on; but in her excitement she kicked over her basket, and all her eggs were broken;

*crocodile tears* – hypocritical tears or hypocritical show of grief. The origin of the phrase was the fab-

ulous belief that the crocodile wept in order to allure, or while devouring its victims. Bacon wrote satirically of the wisdom of the crocodiles that shed tears when they would devour;

*to cut the cackle and come to the horses.* Shorten the general talk about the situation, and deal with the heart of the matter. 'Cackle' (or 'cackling') is noise made by a hen, especially after laying an egg. For 'cut' here compare 'cut down', 'cut short'. The expression comes from impatient horse-buyers at market and means 'Don't trouble about such comparative trivialities as cattle. Sell the horses first';

*dark horse* – a person whose capabilities are unknown, and whose future career cannot be surmised. The term is from horse racing, for a horse about whose racing capabilities little or nothing is known. 'Dark' refers not to a horse with dark hair, but to people being 'in the dark' about it;

*as dead as a dodo* – means something which is dead, extinct, or long out of fashion. The dodo was a large flightless bird, which became extinct in the 1680s;

*a dog in the manger* – a churlish person, though he does not want, or is unable to have something or prevents its being had by others. The phrase comes from Aesop's fable of the dog that, though it had no use for the hay in the manger, growled at the horses and would not let them eat it;

*a dog's life* – a wretched unpleasant existence, especially one that is harassed by over-work, ill treatment or poverty;

*dog days* – the hottest days of the year, during the month of July and first half August;

*in the doghouse.* When dogs misbehaved themselves they were traditionally relegated to their kennel outside the house. Anyone who finds himself 'in the doghouse' today is similarly in disgrace. The saying is usually applied to a husband who has upset his wife in some way by doing, or not doing something;

*dog does not eat dog.* A person ought not to attack, try to injure, try to make profit out of a person of his own set: e. g., one in the same occupation, with the same interests, working in the same cause/ Thus, a doctor does not charge a fee to another doctor;

*dog-tired* – extremely tired. When a dog comes in tired it flops down as if dead;

*to go to the dogs* – to take to bad courses with bad companions; lead an irregular life that will end in ruin;

*let sleeping dogs lie.* Do not disturb a state of affairs with potentialities of harm at present door-mat, lest action may precipitate trouble;

*a cat and dog life* – a relation between two people, of constant bickering and quarrelling, especially between husband and wife. Dogs and cats are traditional enemies;

*donkey-work* – subordinate work. The expression is often used with reference to work and often onerous work, a person has to do, that is much below his or her abilities. The phrase may be connected with a 'donkey-man' or 'donkey-boy', who has rather humble duties of being in charge of a donkey;

*donkey's years* usually refers to a very long passage of time since one did something or saw someone.

The phrase is probably derived from a word-play on 'donkey's ears' which are long. An alternative expression for a long time, which is often used today, is 'yonks ago' or 'yonks years', from the sound made by a donkey;

*an ugly duckling* refers to anything which turns into something much better in the course of time. Originally, it was applied, to a dull or ordinary child that develops into an attractive and interesting adult. The phrase comes from Hans Christian Anderson's story 'The Ugly Duckling'. The duck's foster mother was greatly surprised when the ungainly little creature she had looked after (which was really a cygnet) grew up into a beautiful graceful swan;

*to drink like a fish* – be a drunkard. The simile dates back as far as the middle of the seventeenth, where it is found in Shirley's 'The Triumph of Beauty';

*a fish out of water* – a person situated uncomfortably, outside his usual or proper environment, professionally, in business, socially, etc. The metaphor is as old as Chaucer;

*a kettle of fish.* The expression is always used with an ironic epithet, especially 'pretty', to mean a plight, a disagreeable or awkward state of things. It has been conjectured that a kettle of fish in this sense referred to one cooked in rather primitive conditions in the open air at a picnic or boating excursion;

*neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring.* Neither one thing nor the other; unable to be classified. The phrase can be applied to people or things;

*other fish to fry* – other matters to be engaged in that will be more interesting or profitable;

*to cry stinking fish* – speak about one's own affairs, circumstances, etc. in a way that refers unfavourably on oneself. The implication seems to be that to do this is as stupid as if a man crying (= calling attention to in order to sell) fish were to announce that it was rotten;

*to fish in troubled waters* – to try to benefit from other people's troubles;

*a flea in his ear.* The phrase is always used with reference to the peremptory dismissal of a person in circumstances, especially of unpleasant news, that will cause him acute vexation;

*a flea-bite* – a matter of trifling, negligible inconvenience, annoyance, expense, etc., not worth giving serious thought to;

*the fly in the ointment* – the one circumstance that though trifling, ruins what otherwise would be perfect. The phrase comes from the Bible;

*a white elephant* is an expression used to describe some expensive item, or possession, usually large, which turns out to be useless to its owner and is often costly to maintain, and difficult to get rid of. The phrase relates to the successive kings of Siam who gave a white elephant to any courtier who annoyed them. Although the animals were held in high esteem, and regarded as sacred, their upkeep was so costly that anyone who received it was inevitably ruined;

*a frog in the throat.* This expression is frequently used to describe anyone with a croaking voice or who is afflicted with hoarseness.

In the Middle Ages frogs were actually put into throats, not be eaten but to cure infections, such as the

fungus growth, known as 'thrush'. The head of a live frog was placed in the mouth and, as it breathed, it was said to withdraw the disease into itself;

*Fine feather make fine birds.* To be well dressed gives one an impressive appearance. This expression is generally used with an implication that, as in a bird fine plumage is not the only consideration of merit, so in well-dressed people a fine appearance may only superficially cover a bad character, stupidity, etc.

The original form of this proverbial idiom had '*Fair feathers make fair fowls*'. There was a record of this as far back as 1611. The first record of the current form is a hundred years later;

*to get one's goat* – rouse, or become roused to, anger. One conjecture is that, as a goat, when annoyed, retaliates by butting the person who has offended it, so 'get one's goat' means to incite in one the spirit of an angry goat;

*to get one's monkey up* – means the same as to get one's goat, and probably its origin is similar: the idea that something a person says or does excites the spirit of a monkey roused to retaliate by clawing and biting;

*to go the whole hog* – to do the thing thoroughly;

*A hair of the dog that bit you.* As cures for hangovers still seem to elude sufferers, one popular piece of advice is 'to take a hair of the dog that bit you'. In other words, have another drink in the morning. This refers to the ancient belief that a hair of the dog that bit one, when placed on the wound was the best antidote to the after-effects of its bite;

*Halcyon days* refer to happy times remembered for their contentment and perfection.

Halcyon was the Greek name for the king-fisher. According to legend, Halcyon was the goddess of the winds, married Ceyx, King of Trachis, who drowned when his ship was wrecked in a storm at sea. Halcyon did not know of his death until it was revealed to her in a dream, whereupon she became overwhelmed with grief and threw herself into the sea, close to where his body was floating.

The gods took pity on her and reversed the tragedy by restoring Ceyx to life, and transformed both of them into kingfishers, so that they might live happily together as birds of the water. The gods also promised that whenever she and her descendants were hatching the eggs in their nests, made of fishbones floating on the ocean, that the wind would be held back and the sea remain calm.

It was said that the seven days preceding the winter solstice (the shortest day of the year in December) was the time used by these birds to build their nests on the water and the seven days afterwards were devoted to hatching the eggs.

Although kingfisher's nests are in tunnels beside river banks, not the ocean. Their nests are frequently lined with fishbones, which ties in with the ancient belief, and the Mediterranean is usually calm at the time of the solstice – hence the expression 'halcyon days' denotes periods of calm and contentment;

*May as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb* – In for a penny, in for a pound. Before the 1830s, when the punishments for crimes were harsh, anyone found

guilty of stealing a sheep was sentenced to death by hanging. If they stole something of much less value – a lamb, the penalty was still the same. Thieves reckoned they might just as well steal a sheep as a lamb as it would provide more meat;

*to put the cart before the horse* is of ancient origin and now serves as a warning against not getting our priority right.

Obviously, the horse should come in front of the cart, but when the phrase came into being it was slightly different. Horses don't in fact, pull carts, they push them by pushing on the collar of the harness attached to the cart. So, the original phrase was 'Don't push the cart before the horse';

*to get off one's hobby horse (or soapbox).* Originally, a hobby horse was a type velocipede, first used in England in the mid 1600s, on which the rider sat and pushed himself along with his feet. Although primitive, presumably the experience was enjoyable for the word 'hobby', apart from its archaic reference to a 'small horse', came to mean one's favourite subject or pastime.

Nowadays, to be told to get off one's hobby horse or soapbox is to imply that they are overdoing their pet subject, becoming boring or that what they are saying has all been heard before;

*Horses for courses.* When someone uses this phrase in general conversation, he or she is usually implying that it would be better if people stuck to the thing they know or do best. In racing game, it is used to suggest that some horses run on certain courses better than on others, appreciating a left-hand circuit, perhaps, rather than a right-hand one, or vice-versa;

*to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs* – do something that, designed to produce more benefits from a certain source, destroys the source and leaves one without any benefits. The allusion is to a fable of Aesop in which a man, having a goose that laid a golden egg every day, cut it open to get what he imagined would be a large number of eggs, to find that all he had was a dead bird;

*to kill two birds with one stone* – with one action accomplish two different purposes. The expression is used figuratively as far back as by Thomas Hobbs in 1656, but it appears first in R. Cotgrave's French-English Dictionary in 1611;

*mad as a March hare* is used to describe anyone behaving in an odd or apparently foolish way. Hares tend to be unusually wild in March during the main breeding season. Their antics, leaping, boxing and chasing along the countryside during the courtship displays, make it appear to observers as if they are completely mad;

*to knock into a cocked hat* – utterly defeat a person in a contest or an argument, theory, etc. The old triangular hat worn in the eighteenth century was formed from the Puritan round hat of the preceding century by putting up (or cocking) the brim. Hence, 'to knock into a cocked hat' came to mean to change a thing drastically and then by extended implication to defeat utterly;

*the lion's share* – the greater profit or benefit that one party in a transaction receives or insists on taking.

The phrase is based on one of Aesop's Fables, though not closely, because in that a lion, having with the help of other animals, killed a deer, insists with threats on taking for himself not merely the larger part of the animal, but the whole of it;

*to look a gift-horse in the mouth* – examine a present too critically. The expression is nearly always used negatively in an injunction that this is an undesirable thing to do. A horse's age is judged by the condition of its teeth;

*to lock the stable door after the horse is stolen* – take precautions too late, when the mischief is done. The metaphor appears in many languages. Stevenson cites 1370 as the earliest use in English;

*to rise from the ashes like a phoenix* is often used to describe a favourable development from what appeared to be an impossible or ruinous situation.

According to Greek mythology, the phoenix was a fabulous sacred bird, supposed to live for 500 or 600 years in the deserts of Arabia. As death approached she built herself a nest of spices on an altar, sang a melodious dirge and then set light to the pyre by fanning it with her wings. The flame reduced her to ashes, from which she arose full of youth and vigour to a new life. Now phoenix is a symbol of immortality;

*a pig in the middle*. Anyone in this situation is unlikely to be envied for he will be in a position between two people or groups of people, opposed to each other, whom no one takes any notice of and who is powerless to influence things one way or the other. The phrase comes from the once-popular childrens' game in which the child standing between the opposing players was called 'pig in the middle' and everyone tried to prevent them from getting hold of the ball, catching the players or having any influence on the outcome of the game;

*a pig in a poke*. If something is said to be 'a pig in a poke' this is a warning to have a close look at what you are buying before you part with your money. Frauds were frequently carried out in the old-time markets when a young pig was put on display, and the seller was supposed to be offering others tied in sacks (pokes) ready for carrying away. When those who bought them got home, instead of a sucking-pig they found a cat;

*a pigeon pair*. Pigeons, which were probably the first birds to be domesticated by man, only lay two eggs which, it is said, hatch into one male and one female – hence the expression 'a pigeon pair'. This is sometimes used to describe boy and girl twins or a family consisting of one boy and one girl as sole children;

*One cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear*. It is impossible to turn a person who is by nature coarse or stupid into a refined and intelligent one. James Howell (1594–1666) wrote of the impossibility of making a satin purse out of a sow's ear;

*to play ducks and drakes* – squander one's money. In its primary use the expression means to throw stones into water so that skim over the surface with a bouncing motion. In its figurative use a person squandering money is regarded as throwing it about recklessly for mere amusement;

*red herring* – a side issue to divert attention from the main question. In the sport of stag-hunting as a

strong-smelling lure for the hounds, aniseed was at one time used and later a red herring; and it has been conjectured that this deception of the hounds by the substitution of one thing for another led to the use of the term in its figurative sense;

*like a red rag to a bull* – causing a person to be excitedly angry;

*to ride the high horse* – behave in a superior, haughty, overbearing way; put on airs. The image is that of a person mounted on a horse so high that he looks down on others riding less high horses or walking;

*a round robin* – a petition with signatures in a circle, so that the order in which they were written is not disclosed. This arrangement was originally used by sailors;

*He cannot say (or cry) Bo to a goose*. He is so timid that he can never utter a word to assert himself on any point however small and against anybody however formidable. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary describes the word Bo as an exclamation intended to surprise or frighten, and compares it with a Latin verb *boare* (= to cry aloud, to bellow);

*a snake in the grass* – a treacherous or dangerous person. The first record of the phrase as new established is in 1696 when Charles Leslie, the non-juror controversialist, used it for the title of a pamphlet;

*straight from the horse's mouth* – information direct from reliable sources. A horse is conceived as knowing which will be the winner in a coming race or at all events the part he will take in it, and as giving a tip about this to a person betting in the race;

*the last straw to break a camel's back*. When things continue to go wrong and one difficulty follows another, we do our best to cope. But very often there is one trouble too many, something quite small in itself but which coupled to all the other problems, proves to be 'the last straw' and too much for us to take.

The phrase, which goes back to the 17th century refers to the supposition that if camel's load is increased straw by straw the stage will be reached where the addition of one final straw will be enough 'to break the camel's back';

*a swan song* is the last literary or musical production of a person, especially one composed shortly before his or her death. The allusion is to a fabulous belief that a swan sings shortly or immediately before it dies.

*to take the bull by the horns* – boldly face and tackle the difficulty (= take the wolf by the ears);

*to talk turkey* is to talk purposefully about profitable matters, and 'cold turkey' is a demand for the straight truth. The origin is obscure but probably comes from the gobble-gobble noise turkeys make and the chatter between two people discussing money;

*to temper the wind to the shorn lamb* – adopt gentle methods in dealing with the weaker brethren. 'Temper' here means 'regulate', 'restrain', 'check', 'curb' so as to prevent the animal from being exposed to cold winds as a lamb just shorn is more susceptible to cold than a full-grown sheep. The original proverb seems to have been French as far back as the end of the 16th century;

*to throw to the wolves* – sacrifice, give as a sop. In order to extricate oneself from a difficult situation or

pacify opponents or critics one sacrifices a subordinate person who is not primarily or seriously guilty in the matter concerned, so making him a sort of scapegoat. Perhaps the idea underlying the expression is that of throwing food or a living animal to a pack of pursuing wolves in order to divert their attention;

*A whale of time* is a hugely enjoyable time. (The whale is the largest animal that has ever lived, dwarfing even the largest living mammal, the elephant);

*a wild goose chase* is an absurdly hopeless enterprise. Even now the chase is only rarely successful;

*to cry wolf* is to raise a false alarm. From Aesop's fable of the shepherd boy who so often cried 'Wolf' to cause excitement and alarm to his neighbours that at last a wolf did come, nobody paid attention, and all the sheep he was in charge of, were killed;

*to keep the wolf from the door* – avoid starvation or acute poverty. The wolf as a

fierce animal is taken figuratively as a symbol of destructive force. Used figuratively it

appears in John Heywood's collection of proverbs in 1546;

*to take the wolf by the ears* means the same as to take the bull by the horns but is naturally less common as wolves no longer exist in Great Britain;

*a wolf in sheep's clothing* is a dangerous enemy who plausibly poses as a friend. The allusion here is again to a fable of Aesop. A wolf, disguising itself in a sheep's skin, succeeds in deceiving a flock of sheep and entering the sheepfold.

The above represented contents of the article give good reason for drawing the following **conclusion**.

An idiomatic phrase is a sequence of words which has a different integral meaning as a group from the meaning it would have if you understood each word separately.

The information in the article about 100 most frequently used idioms formed with participation of animalistic components testifies to their availability as the essential part of phraseology, stipulated by the keen interest of the English nation to the way of life, appearance and typical behaviour of the representatives of animate nature.

There are three main categories of animalistic components of idioms that are distinguished as far as their frequency of occurrence is concerned, that is, the level of their productivity in phraseformation. To the first, the most numerous category belong those idioms in which an animalistic component is distinguished as far as their frequency of occurrence is concerned, that is, the level of their productivity in phraseformation. To the first, the most numerous category belong those idioms in which an animalistic component is mentioned only in one idiom (e. g., *cow, chicken swine, hog, sow, pigeon*, etc.); to the second – in two idioms (e. g., *swan, goose, bird, lion, donkey, flea, sheep*, etc.); to the third – more than ten animalistic idioms, formed with the participation of one and the same name, denoting a living creature (e. g., *cat, dog, horse, fish*). Besides fish, they all signify names of domestic animals. Therefore, a conclusion is drawn that corporal closeness is the result of abundance of animalistic idioms in Modern English.

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## ПОХОДЖЕННЯ ТА ЗНАЧЕННЯ АНГЛІЙСЬКИХ АНІМАЛІСТИЧНИХ ІДІОМ

**Анотація.** У статті йдеться про походження та значення англійських анімалістичних ідіом. Автор пропонує визначення ідіоми як групи слів зі спеціальним значенням, яке відрізняється від семантики її вербальних складників. Це значення не можна вивести з семантичних компонентів слів, що входять до складу ідіоми. У статті наведено низку різновидів ідіоматичних фразем, обґрунтовано контекстуальний підхід до визначення їхньої семантики.

**Актуальність** теми дослідження. Оскільки в українській англістиці анімалістичні ідіоми не були предметом окремого наукового пошуку, тобто дотепер невідомо, які конкретні назви живих істот беруть ту чи іншу участь у формуванні усталених висловів, зміст статті зосереджений на заповненні цієї прогалини. Для отримання якомога точніших даних було проаналізовано 100 найчастіше вживаних ідіом, до складу яких входять назви багатьох видів живих істот незалежно від способу їх пересування у просторі. Кожна з наведених ідіом супроводжується дефініцією та коротким екскурсом в історію її виникнення.

**Метою** написання статті було отримання тієї інформації про кожну із досліджених фразем, яка ще не була предметом окремого розгляду і шляхи її входження в мовний узус. **Завдання роботи:** ознайомлення з досліджуваною проблемою; відбір емпіричного матеріалу з низки лексикографічних джерел; аналіз походження відібраних фразем.

Застосовано такі сучасні **методи** проведення аналізу фразеологічної семантики: фразеологічна ідентифікація, опис і аналіз словникових дефініцій із вибіркоким покликанням на лексикографічні та літературні джерела. До аналізу також долучено варіанти деяких анімалістичних ідіом.

**Результати.** Отримані дані дослідження переконливо доводять наявність глибокого зацікавлення англійського етносу зовнішністю, способом життя й типовою поведінкою живих істот, назви яких спричинилися до утворення й частого вживання наведених анімалістичних ідіом. У статті також запропонована категоризація досліджених ідіом, що ґрунтується на здатності тієї чи тієї назви живої істоти до утворення однієї або значної кількості анімалістичних ідіом. Запропонована чітко окреслена градація участі назв живих істот у формуванні фразеологічного потенціалу в англійській мові.

**Перспективи досліджень.** Предметом подальшого дослідження може слугувати порівняльно-зіставний аспект анімалістичної фраземіки у близько- й віддаленоспоріднених мовах.

**Ключові слова:** ідіома, анімалістичний, фразеологічний потенціал, усталена фраза, висловлення (формулювання) думки, мовний зворот.

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