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CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF IDIOMS WITH ANTHROPONYM COMPONENT

Abstract. Language plays a crucial role in the development of both an individual and an entire nation. Idioms reflect all the national and cultural specificity of the language, store the system of values, traditions, history and geography of a community united by one culture. The close connection between idioms and culture, history, traditions and literature of the people speaking a particular language is obvious. This connection is most clearly evident in idioms with the onym component. A significant part of idioms of this type has become an integral part of the vocabulary of the English language. For this reason, this layer of vocabulary has always been the object of increased attention from linguists.

The purpose of the article is to perform a semantic analysis of the anthroponymic idioms selected for the study, as well as to consider their use and scope in modern English through the prism of the corpus. The paper is based on the method of corpus linguistic research.

The corpus of idioms with the anthroponym component selected through a continuous sampling from the English-Ukrainian dictionary has been analyzed in terms of their semantics, which allowed identifying a number of semantic groups of idioms with the anthroponym component. We should note that the boundaries between the groups are somewhat vague since many anthroponymic phrases, due to their dual semantics, may belong to two groups or subgroups simultaneously, which presents specific difficulties in the distribution of the actual linguistic material.

The analysis shows that idioms with anthropocentric semantics denote a person in all his/her hypostases, comprehensively characterizing an individual, and describing the appearance, character, behavior, and social status.

A corpus-based analysis of anthroponymic idioms has allowed establishing the frequency of each idiomatic unit; determining the standard form of the idiom from the point of view of its modern usage; elucidating the variants of certain idioms; describing the typical modifications of the structure of an idiom; identifying



the types of contexts in which their occurrence is prevalent and specify their distribution across the genres.

Keywords: corpus analysis, idiom, anthroponym, anthropocentric semantics.

Problem statement. Idioms containing anthroponyms are the wealth of the language; they not only reflect the culture and life of the language bearers but also help to make the language more expressive and emotional. In every historical period, the anthroponymicon of any country or culture contains names with certain national-specific, cultural, historical or symbolic connotations in their semantics. These are names of famous personalities, biblical, mythological and literary characters endowed with bright characteristic features, as well as personal names common among native speakers. These names largely lose the features of their category and become symbols of certain qualities, attributes, characteristics of people; some of them become figurative names of phenomena and concepts of the surrounding world.

Nowadays, the linguistic corpus is becoming the main source for the scientific study of language. Linguistic research cannot be considered reliable without verifying actual language data. A corpus, owing to its much less energy-consuming approach, enables us to analyze large volumes of texts and identify patterns that might have escaped the researcher's attention with regular manual sampling.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The anthroponymic layer of vocabulary has become the object of several academic studies in the structural, semantic and functional aspects [2; 3; 4]. Proper names as components of idioms have been examined based on different languages in the works of Ukrainian and foreign scholars [5; 6; 7; 13]. Idioms are increasingly becoming researched using the corpus approach [11]. However, the works focusing on the corpus-based study of idioms with anthroponymic components are extremely scarce; thus, the current study dealing with idioms with proper names within the frame of corpus linguistics is highly relevant.

The **purpose** of the article is to perform a semantic analysis of the anthroponymic idioms, as well as to consider their use and scope in modern English through the prism of the corpus.

Material presentation. Direct access to authentic material in the field of foreign language phraseology can be obtained through the possibilities of corpus linguistics. Corpus linguistics is a holistic methodology that can be applied to many linguistic problems. In this sense, corpus linguistics can be called a bundle of methods from different areas of linguistic research. The basic concept of corpus linguistics is the electronic language corpus. There are two ways of using electronic corpora in linguistic research: corpus-based and corpus-driven [12, p. 5]. However, it should be noted that the distinction between these two approaches is somewhat

tentative. Representing the whole range of modern corpus studies, T. McEnery and A. Hardie argue that the differences between the two main approaches to studying linguistic phenomena (corpus-driven and corpus-based) are indistinct [10, p. 6].

Working with the corpus allows the researcher: to establish the frequency of each idiom included in the dictionary; identify whether a given word combination can be considered an idiom; determine the standard form of the lemma from the point of view of modern usage, specifying the governance structures of the corresponding idioms; ascertain the set of the most significant variants of each idiom; determine the polysemy structure of each idiom and specify the description of its particular meanings; describe the typical modifications of the structure of each idiom; identify the typical environment of the described idioms and the types of contexts in which their occurrence is perceived as the most natural one.

Our research is based on the COCA corpus created in 2008 at Brigham Young University. The advantages of the COCA corpus, according to A. Boulton [8], include the following: it is a large, structured, constantly updated corpus of general purpose, covering texts of different types and genres; it contains more than 560 million word uses, occurring in more than two hundred thousand texts of oral and written speech of different styles and genres. Since 1990, twenty million new lexemes have been added to the corpus annually.

Semantic analysis of anthropocentric idioms. The idioms with the anthroponym component selected for this study (a total of 287 idioms of the English language) have been classified into the following semantic groups:

1. Idioms with anthropocentric semantics.
2. Idioms denoting concrete objects.
3. Idioms with temporal and spatial semantics.
4. Idioms denoting abstract concepts.
5. Idioms denoting fairy-tale and magical creatures and artifacts.
6. Idioms describing the measure and degree of manifestation of an action or attribute.
7. Idioms denoting the phenomena of animate and inanimate nature.

Within this study, we focus on the idioms with the anthroponym component having *anthropocentric semantics* totalling 127 units. They denote a person in all his/her hypostases, comprehensively characterizing an individual, describing the appearance, character, behavior, and social status. These idioms perform a nominative function, naming humankind, a person of the male or female sex, or people according to a particular attribute, for example, *Adam's race; Adam's son or son of Adam; the daughter of Eve, or Eve's daughter; Jack and Gill or Jill; Box and Cox; Tom, Dick and (or) Harry (Jack, Jem or Jonathan); Mrs. Grundy or Joe Doaks*, etc.



This group also includes units denoting a person or group of people by race, nationality, or territorial affiliation: *Brown, Jones and Robinson; cousin (Cousin) Jack; Brother or Uncle Jonathan*.

It is worth noting that many of these idioms have derogative connotations and are labelled as “contemptuous” or “derisive”, for example: *John Bull* – “Джон Буль, типовий англієць (глузливе прізвисько англійців)” [1, p. 560], *Jim Crow* – “амер. през. Джім Кроу (прізвисько, яке дали неграм американські расисти)” [1, p. 560].

Idioms belonging to the first group give a social characteristic of a person and denote the following groups of people by their occupation: maid, servant – *John Thomas; Lord Steward of the Household*; robber, thief, criminal – *Jack the Ripper; Peter Funk; Nicholas' clerk*; persons involved in court proceedings – *John Doe and Richard Roe; Daniel come to judgement; Jack-leg lawyer; Jack Ketch; John o'Nokes and John o'Styles; Richard Roe*; ignorant, talentless official – *Jack out of doors or Jack out of office*; fortune teller – *Mother Bunch*.

A significant number of anthropocentric idioms denote representatives of various professions and artisans: military – *Bill Jim; big John; G I Joe or G I; Jack Raw or Johnny Newcome or Raw; Jack tar or Tar; Joe Blow; Tommy Atkins*; doctors – *a son of Aesculapius*; tailors – *Tom Tailor*; merchants – *cheap Jack or John*; artists, performers – *Christy minstrels*.

Idioms with the anthroponym component characterize a person in terms of family and social relations with other people. Thus, we have identified the units denoting people in love, brides, spouses, for example, *Darby or Daerby and Joan; a good Jack makes a good Jill; John Thomson's man; Strephon and Phyllis*; as well as friends, for example, *the Damon and Pythias; David and Jonathan; Sister Ann*.

The research has fixed the idioms denoting the nicknames of specific individuals – presidents, priests, statesmen, writers, etc., for example, *father Abraham* – “«батько Авраам», президент США Авраам Лінкольн” [1, p. 323], *honest Abe or honest old Abe; old Abe* – “амер. чесний (або чесний старий, старий) Ейб, прізвисько президента Авраама Лінкольна” [1, p. 504].

Idioms with anthropocentric semantics describe the human body as an organism, its organs, diseases, and various parameters of human appearance, such as: beauty – *Gibson girl; May Queen or the Queen of May; Queen of the May*; high or short stature – *long John Silver; Jack Sprat*; age – *(as) old as Adam or (as) old as Adam's rib; (as) old as Methuselah*; voice and laughter – *Punch's voice; Cordelia's gift; Homeric laughter*; hair colour – *Judas hair*; other parameters – *Punch-and-Judy chin; Vandyke beard or Van Dyke beard; Adam's apple; little Mary; St. John's evil*, etc.

Units with the anthroponym component describe human character traits, behavior and mental abilities, namely:

1) a deceiver, a hypocrite, a swindler, an adventurer – *Tom Pepper; Jack of (on) both sides; smooth joe;*

2) a madman, a fool, a simpleton, a blockhead – *Bess o' Bedlam; Dumb Dora; Dumb Dora's brother; Jack or Tom o' (of) Bedlam; Tom fool; one is no Solomon; Simple Simon; John Trot;*

3) a person with a bad reputation, an impudent, arrogant, and self-righteous person – *a smart Alec or Aleck, alec, aleck; Jack Horner; the daughter of Jezebel; (as) proud as Lucifer;*

4) unprincipled, irresponsible, immoral, promiscuous person – *the old Adam; man or son of Belial; lusty Laurence; gay Lothario;*

5) a curious, inquisitive person – *Nosey or Nosy Parker; Paul Pry;*

6) a conservative, tough-minded person – *Rip Van Winkle;*

7) a doubting person, sceptic – *a doubting Thomas, a very Thomas;*

8) a merry prancer, jester, clown – *Jack pudding; merry Andrew or Merry Andrew; merry-andrew; Merry-Andrew;*

9) a good, kind person, optimist – *a Mark Tapley;*

10) generous person – *Lady Bountiful;*

11) wasteful person – *coal-oil Johnny;*

12) smart, learned person – *the wisdom of Solomon; the admirable Crichton;*

13) a taciturn, calm, patient person – *as patient as Job; Balaam's ass;*

14) a lazy person – *as lazy as Ludlam's dog that leaned his head against the wall to bark; Bertie Wooster, etc.*

Anthropocentric idioms denote various human physical and mental actions or states, further characterizing a person, namely:

- to be reborn, renewed, to recover from severe grief or illness – *Richard is himself again;*

- enjoy drinking, get drunk – *Bacchus has drowned more men than Neptune;*

- to swear, terrorize, frighten, fight, hurts smb. – *to raise Cain (raise Ned. to; raise promiscuous Ned, to); to play Old Harry with; give (one) Jesse;*

- to die – *to go to Abraham's bosom; to go to Davy Jones's or Davy's locker;*

- to take on an impossible task, to do hard work, to work hard, to do a job well – *a Jack of all trades and (or is) master of none; Jack of all trades or Jack-of-all-trades;*

- to give credit where credit is due, to have what you deserve – *to give (one) a Roland for an Oliver; all shall be well, Jack shall have Jill;*

- to be safe, happy, content – *to live in Abraham's or Arthur's bosom;*

- to lie, trick, deceive, cheat – *to sham Abraham; to play Janus;*



- to be lazy, to be idle, to do work in bad faith – *let George do it; Laurence bids wages;*
- to keep smb. waiting – *John or Tom Long the carrier, etc.*

Anthroponymic idioms include expressions denoting human speech and mental activity: *Queen Anne (Elizabeth) is dead!; to appeal to Caesar; a Roland for an Oliver; Socratic irony; Tommy Rot; Joe Miller, etc.*

The group of units with anthropocentric semantics also includes units expressing a person's emotional state, for example: *by George!; by Lord Harry!; Christ's foot!; let her go, Gallagher!; Mary forbid! etc.*

Corpus analysis of anthropocentric idioms. The corpus-based research of idioms allows revealing the peculiarities of idioms' combinability and specifying their possible grammatical forms. In addition, the study of the corpus materials helps not only to determine more and less frequent variants but also to identify units that have not yet been recorded in dictionaries.

The obtained results reveal that idioms with anthropocentric semantics are widely used in modern English since out of the sample of 127 selected units, 66 idioms have been fixed in the corpus (found in their normative form and 6 in the transformed one). At the same time, no examples of 61 idioms have been found in the corpus using the specified search mode. The twenty most frequent idioms are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Anthroponymic idioms in the COCA corpus

| | Idiom | Frequency | Example |
|----|--|------------------|---|
| 1. | Adam's apple | 457 | That boy is nearly a man, with hair on his chin and an Adam's apple . |
| 2. | Jack the Ripper | 280 | Multi-murderers rarely get away with their crimes for long. What about Jack the Ripper ? |
| 3. | honest (old) Abe | 250 | Thanks to old Honest Abe we have our house back and I learned a valuable lesson. |
| 4. | Rip Van Winkle | 183 | Jack is our Rip Van Winkle , so to speak, and Ellie is his lovelorn manager. |
| 5. | Jack of all trades and (is) master of none | 155 | Handy men are a jack of all trades and masters of none . |
| 6. | smart Alec / smart Aleck | 124 | You frown at the joke-of-the-month and call me a smart aleck . |
| 7. | a doubting (very) Thomas | 119 | I was from the age of 6 taught to ask questions, be a doubting Thomas , to debate and to be a contrarian!! |

| | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|
| 8. | father Abraham | 86 | Instead of addressing the taxes, Father Abraham persuades the colonists to focus on the actual work of growing America's economy, on filling bushels. |
| 9. | Tom, Dick and (or) Harry | 60 | Tell Tom, Dick and Harry that I got sick and needed to excuse myself. |
| 10. | Adam's rib | 53 | Then He created man, and from Adam's rib He created woman- and that took surgery. |
| 11. | Son of Adam | 53 | O son of Adam , how ignorant art thou in the long indulgence of hope! |
| 12. | Adam's sin | 53 | We do not inherit Adam's sin , we commit our own. |
| 13. | May Queen/Queen of the May/ the Queen of May | 53 | As I expected, the May Queen wore the grandest dress of all - a flowing affair of pure white, the skirt having elaborate pleats with flowers ... |
| 14. | Simple Simon | 51 | Hey, baby, there he is, Simple Simon . You let him be! It's me you want. |
| 15. | the wisdom of Solomon | 49 | One can say that through his actions this man did not display the wisdom of Solomon . |
| 16. | the old Adam | 41 | Since the old Adam conveyed such a vigorous principle of corruption, the new Adam is not venting to endue the principle of his conveyance with a suitable activity. |
| 17. | Judas kiss | 33 | "Two Shakespearean actors" may be Richard Nelson's love letter to the theatrical profession, but he has written it with a poison pen and sealed it with a Judas kiss . |
| 18. | Gibson girl | 27 | With a wealth of smooth red hair, she simply mounded it atop her head in the Gibson girl style that was becoming so popular. |
| 19. | Vandyke beard/ Van Dyke beard | 23 | He stood with his hands in the pockets of a cashmere topcoat, a Vandyke beard on his chin, and a fine fedora on his head. |
| 20. | Jack Sprat | 22 | Well, well. Look who's slumming. Little Jack Sprat . |

The data of the table show that the most represented idiom is "Adam's apple" – "адамове яблуко, кадик" [1, p. 18]. COCA registers a total of 457 occurrences of the idiom. Analyzing the data on the frequency distribution over time provided by COCA for all occurrences, we find out that the frequency of the idiom increases in the period 1995-2004, before decreasing considerably over the period 2015-2019 (see Table 2).



Table 2.

Frequency of “Adam’s apple” for the period 1990-2019 (Source: Davies, 2022).

| | | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1990-94 | 1995-99 | 2000-04 | 2005-09 | 2010-14 | 2015-19 |
| 62 | 84 | 88 | 71 | 75 | 50 |
| 22.2 | 23.5 | 23.3 | 23.0 | 23.2 | 23.0 |
| 2.79 | 3.56 | 3.76 | 3.06 | 3.23 | 2.16 |

As far as the distribution across genres is concerned, the data from COCA for all the 457 occurrences show that the idiom “Adam’s apple” is distributed across a wide range of genres (see Table 3), the most frequent of which is fiction represented by 293 occurrences, for instance:

“It had been like being ambushed by a sword-swallower, right up close, inches from his Adam’s apple” [9].

Table 3.

Distribution of “Adam’s apple” across genres (Source: Davies, 2022).

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Section | ALL | BLOG | WEB | TV/M | SPOK | FIC | MAG | NEWS | ACAD |
| Frequency | 457 | 5 | 22 | 68 | 12 | 293 | 36 | 9 | 12 |
| Words (m) | 993 | 128.6 | 124.3 | 128.1 | 126.1 | 118.3 | 126.1 | 121.7 | 119.8 |
| Per mil. | 0.46 | 0.04 | 0.18 | 0.53 | 0.10 | 2.48 | 0.29 | 0.07 | 0.10 |

The distribution across the genres appears to depend on the semantics of the idiom. Thus, the unit “Jack the Ripper” – “Джек-Потрошитель” [1, p. 559] is mostly represented in the genre of TV or movies (see Table 4), for example:

“After one night with you, I understand how you got up in more British guts than Jack the Ripper” [9].

Table 4.

Distribution of “Jack the Ripper” across genres (Source: Davies, 2022).

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Section | ALL | BLOG | WEB | TV/M | SPOK | FIC | MAG | NEWS | ACAD |
| Frequency | 280 | 40 | 27 | 94 | 20 | 40 | 17 | 38 | 4 |
| Words (m) | 993 | 128.6 | 124.3 | 128.1 | 126.1 | 118.3 | 126.1 | 121.7 | 119.8 |
| Per mil. | 0.28 | 0.31 | 0.22 | 0.73 | 0.16 | 0.34 | 0.13 | 0.31 | 0.03 |

Compared with the usage of the idioms above, which are mainly spread across the genres of fiction and TV/movies, the unit “the wisdom of Solomon” – “мудрість Соломона” [1, p. 1013] is prevalent in magazines and web sections (see Table 5), for example:

“For the wisdom of Solomon, the natural order itself reveals God, and the historical events recounted in Genesis and Exodus can be retold with all proper names omitted as the work of personified wisdom herself” [9].

Table 5.

Distribution of “wisdom of Solomon” across genres (Source: Davies, 2022).

| Section | ALL | BLOG | WEB | TV/M | SPOK | FIC | MAG | NEWS | ACAD |
|-----------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Frequency | 49 | 6 | 10 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 11 | 3 | 9 |
| Words (m) | 993 | 128.6 | 124.3 | 128.1 | 126.1 | 118.3 | 126.1 | 121.7 | 119.8 |
| Per mil. | 0.05 | 0.05 | 0.08 | 0.04 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 0.09 | 0.02 | 0.08 |

The analysis of 2311 occurrences of idioms in the corpus has revealed that 23,6% of all usages fall to the fiction genre, while the least represented genre is academic, comprising 7% of all usages (see Table 6).

Table 6

Distribution of anthroponymic idioms across genres in COCA corpus

| | Section | Frequency | Percentage |
|----|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. | BLOG | 187 | 8,2 |
| 2. | WEB | 346 | 14,9 |
| 3. | TV / MOVIES | 323 | 14 |
| 4. | SPOKEN | 228 | 9,8 |
| 5. | FICTION | 545 | 23,6 |
| 6. | MAGAZINE | 231 | 10 |
| 7. | NEWSPAPER | 289 | 12,5 |
| 8. | ACADEMIC | 162 | 7 |
| | Total | 2311 | 100% |

Idiom variation is recognized, to a greater or lesser extent, by most home and foreign researchers. Our analysis of idioms has revealed the following typical transformations:



- reduction of the idiom composition: “Each of the characters make their case to the player, and the player must use the virtual weapon on the character they think is **the Ripper**, presumably killing them, as the ending narration is spoken in the past tense” [9] (omission of the anthroponym “Jack” from the normative idiom “Jack the Ripper”)
- introduction of an additional element into the idiom composition: “Who’s that in my office? Well, aren’t you just **Miss Nosey Parker?**” [9] (introduction of an element “Miss” into the normative idiom “Nosy/nosey Parker”);
- a change in grammatical form or syntactic function: “It had worked until some **smart aleck officer** decided to pull me over for obstructing traffic” [9] (the usage of the substantive idiom “Smart Aleck” as an attribute);
- lexical variation of idiom components: “All the paperwork was typed, the individual letters not quite aligned and indented deep into the paper, wavering between black ink and red; they had acquired a typewriter when the parish office bought a new one, and it had seemed Biblical in itself, presiding over their playroom, **as ancient as Methuselah**, too heavy for them to lift, its action thunderous and punitive” [9] (substitution of the element “old” by the lexeme “ancient” in the normative idiom “as old as Methuselah”).

Conclusions. Idioms with anthropocentric semantics give various nominations to a person by gender, race, national or territorial affiliation, social characteristics. They also comprehensively characterize an individual, describing his or her appearance, character and behavior.

The sample of idioms includes 127 units manifested by 66 idioms fixed in the corpus. The idioms have been found in their normative and transformed forms. The most widely used idiom is “Adam’s apple” fixed in the COCA corpus by a total of 457 occurrences. The unit has been predominantly distributed in the genre of fiction. The analysis of all idiom occurrences in the corpus allows drawing the conclusion that the genre of fiction is represented by 23,6% of all idiom usages while idioms are the least distributed across the academic genre.

The available English corpus can be used as a valuable resource in the study of idioms in their variations. Thus, anthropocentric idioms have been fixed in the following transformations: reduction of the idiom composition; introduction of an additional element into the idiom composition; a change in grammatical form or syntactic function; lexical variation of idiom components.

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