

UDC 811.111

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/tps2663-4880/2023.31.12>

СЕМАНТИЧНИЙ АНАЛІЗ ІДІОМ НА ПОЗНАЧЕННЯ СУПЕРЕЧКИ ТА КОНФЛІКТУ В АНГЛІЙСЬКІЙ МОВІ

SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF IDIOMS DENOTING ARGUMENT AND CONFLICT IN ENGLISH

Popovych Ye.V.,

orcid.org/0000-0003-2279-2750

*Lecturer at the English Philology Department,
Uzhhorod National University*

Petiy N.V.,

orcid.org/0000-0002-3999-0932

*Senior lecturer at the English Philology Department
Uzhhorod National University*

The use of idioms is integral to everyday conversations, adding a sense of innovation to language through metaphorical and metonymical expressions. Despite their common use, defining idioms universally proves challenging due to their intricate and sometimes misleading nature. This article explores idioms through a semantic analysis, focusing on expressions associated with argument and conflict. Drawing on the works of various scholars it examines idiomatic expressions as unique linguistic constructions that elude straightforward definitions, emphasizing their pragmatic significance over lexical aspects.

The literature review highlights conflicts as inherent aspects of human existence and explores how idioms serve as vehicles for expressing conflicts and arguments. The studies by Zh. Krasnobayeva-Chorna, L. Bilokonko, I. Harbera, and E. Koliada dissect the distinctive expression of verbal aggression in Ukrainian phraseology, examine deception in phraseology, delineate lexico-semantic domains in Ukrainian and English phraseology, and classify English phraseological units capturing conflict meanings.

The material and methods section outlines a semantic analysis of thirty-two idioms related to argument and conflict, sourced from the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms. These idioms are systematically categorized based on the semantic domain associated with their central terms. Definition analysis and contextual analysis elucidate the semantics, connotations, and figurative aspects embedded in these idioms.

The results and discussion section presents findings on idioms categorized into semantic groups such as "Human being", "Artifacts", "Nature", "Sports and warfare", "Bible and mythology", and "Physical phenomena". Idioms related to the human body, artifacts, nature, sports, warfare, and biblical references are explored, revealing their metaphorical significance in conveying conflict-related notions. The study identifies and analyzes distinct semantic categories of idioms associated with conflict, revealing their metaphorical and figurative expressions.

Key words: idiom, argument, conflict, semantic analysis, meaning.

Використання ідіом є невід'ємною складовою щоденної комунікації. Вони покликані створювати відчуття інноваційності мовлення завдяки метафоричним та метонімічним виразам. Незважаючи на їхнє широке використання, універсальне тлумачення ідіом викликає труднощі через їхню складну, а іноді й заплутану сутність. У цій статті проведено семантичний аналіз англійських ідіом, що використовуються для позначення суперечок та конфліктів. Спираючись на праці різних науковців, автори розглядають ідіоматичні вирази як унікальні мовні утворення, які не піддаються однозначному визначенню, наголошуючи на їхній прагматичній важливості, радше ніж на лексичних аспектах.

Аналіз літератури розглядає конфлікти як неодмінні аспекти людського існування. Різні науковці присвячують свої праці вивченню ідіом як мовних засобів вираження конфліктів та суперечок. Дослідження Ж. Краснобаєвої-Чорної, Л. Білоконенко, І. Гарвери, Є. Коляди розглядають особливості вираження вербальної агресії в українській фразеології, вивчають поняття обману у фразеології, розмежовують лексико-семантичні поля в українській та англійській фразеології, класифікують англійські фразеологічні одиниці зі значенням конфлікту.

Методологія нашого дослідження включає семантичний аналіз тридцяти двох ідіом, пов'язаних з суперечками та конфліктами, відібраних з Оксфордського словника ідіом. Аналіз базується на ідіомах, відібраних з онлайн-публікацій відомої англійської газети «Вашингтон Пост». Ідіоми були класифіковані згідно з семантичною категорією, до якої належить ключова лексема у їхній структурі. Дефініційний та контекстуальний аналізи розкривають семантику, конотації та образні аспекти, втілені в англійських ідіомах, що вербалізують суперечки та конфлікти.

У статті представлено результати дослідження ідіом, згрупованих за такими семантичними групами, як «Людина», «Артефакти», «Природа», «Спорт і війна», «Біблія і міфологія» та «Фізичні явища». У праці виокремлено та проаналізовано окремі семантичні категорії ідіом, пов'язаних з конфліктом, виявлено їх метафоричне та образне вираження.

Ключові слова: ідіома, суперечка, конфлікт, семантичний аналіз, значення.

Problem statement. The use of idioms plays a crucial role in everyday conversations and communication in a broader sense. Idioms often take the form of metaphorical or metonymical expressions, contributing a sense of innovation to language. Conversely, certain idioms are used in conventional ways and have become firmly established in specific communication contexts. Many linguists argue that providing a universal definition of idioms encompassing all their features and attributes is practically impossible. This challenge arises from the intricate and sometimes misleading nature of studying idioms, making it difficult to arrive at precise answers. According to Andreas Langlotz, idioms are unique linguistic constructions that have stirred considerable debate in linguistics and frequently bewilder those new to a language [10, p. 1].

The idiomatic expression is a semantic unit or phrase that cannot be comprehended, deduced, constructed, or predicted based on the meanings of individual words or components within the expression [6, p. 208]. Consequently, idiomatic expressions are not tethered to their lexical aspects. Moreover, idioms lack denotational meanings and are instead discerned solely through their pragmatic significance or usage.

The essence of an idiomatic expression lies solely in its distant figurative or metaphorical meaning, which is distinctly separate from its literal interpretation. The determination of literal or figurative meaning is facilitated by considering linguistic and situational context [8, p. 37]. Z. Kövecses and P. Szabó assert that the figurative meaning of idiomatic expressions involves the use of metonymy and metaphor [9, p. 326–331].

In our article, we adhere to the definition of idioms as provided in A Dictionary of Linguistics and

Phonetics by Crystal. According to Crystal, idioms are a term used in grammar and lexicology to denote a sequence of words that is semantically and often syntactically restricted, functioning as a cohesive unit. Semantically, the individual meanings of words within the idiomatic expression cannot be combined to derive the overall meaning of the expression. Syntactically, these words typically do not allow the usual variations seen in other contexts [7, p. 236].

Analysis of recent research and publications. Conflicts constitute an inherent aspect of our existence, permeating the lives of nearly every individual. It manifests as a collision of divergent objectives, interests, positions, opinions, or perspectives between adversaries or interactive entities [5, p. 19]. The realm of language functions as a platform where conflicts and arguments are expressed, and idioms play a significant role as a means of conveying them. In this framework, researchers investigate diverse aspects of idioms associated with conflict. Zh. Krasnobayeva-Chorna explores the distinctive expression of active verbal aggression in Ukrainian phraseology using the phraseoideographic paradigm. The study analyzes the parameters for classifying active verbal aggression in various communicative theories and practices. It delineates the specifics of how active verbal aggression (including shouting, accusing, demanding, ridiculing, criticizing, insulting, commenting, gossiping, slandering, complaining, teasing, cursing, blaspheming, expressing indignation, conveying destructive wishes, issuing threats, and casting curses) is manifested in Ukrainian phraseology [4].

L. Bilokonenko's study examines distinctive characteristics of falsehood, lies, and deception, exploring their various manifestations. The research has identified a sphere of conflicting values associated with

these phenomena and linked them to specific phraseological units. Additionally, the study has established the communicative and pragmatic intentions inherent in the identified phraseological units [1].

The objective of I. Harbera's article is to delineate the primary lexico-semantic domains using Ukrainian and English phraseology, illustrating the diverse elements of conflict interaction within Ukrainian and English societies. The research focuses on conflict-inducing phraseology in Ukrainian and English languages, specifically exploring phraseological units that portray verbal conflict, physical conflict, various conflict types, and the contextual aspects of conflicts [2].

E. Koliada explores English phraseological units that capture the dynamics of conflict. The scholar classifies the idioms according to the six stages of conflict: 1) pre-conflict situation (latent period); 2) incident; 3) escalation; 4) culmination; 5) end of the conflict; 6) post-conflict situations [3].

This article **aims** to conduct a comprehensive examination of idioms through semantic analysis, with a specific focus on expressions associated with argument and conflict.

Material and methods. In line with the aim outlined in this article, a comprehensive examination of idioms was undertaken focusing on semantic analysis. Specifically, a carefully selected set of thirty-two idioms associated with argument and conflict was chosen for the analytical process. The linguistic data for this study were sourced from the Oxford Dictionary of Idioms [11]. The idioms were methodically organized according to the specific semantic domain associated with the central term of each idiomatic expression. These semantic categories were classified into the following primary groups: "Human being", "Artifacts", "Nature", "Sports and warfare", "Bible and mythology", "Physical phenomena".

The examination of idiom meaning through definition analysis aimed to elucidate the semantics of idioms, revealing the connotations and nuances embedded in these expressions. This analytical approach helped to discern the evaluative, metaphorical, or vivid characteristics of idioms and their role in denoting arguments and conflicts. Contextual analysis complemented this process analyzing the usage of idiomatic expressions within specific media contexts. A diverse array of idioms sourced from online publications of the prominent English newspaper "Washington Post" formed the basis of our analysis. These idioms were examined within the broader context of the articles or headlines in which they occurred.

Presentation of the main material. Idioms incorporating terms related to the human body are prevalent not only in the realms of people's relations but also across various linguistic contexts. This prevalence stems from the significant role that words associated, both loosely and closely, with the human body have played and continue to play in the formation of idiomatic expressions. Such words, intricately linked to human existence, serve as a crucial foundation for the development of idioms across diverse areas of language usage. This subcategory encompasses idioms featuring a key term that semantically refers to a part of the human body. It includes both visible components such as throat, tooth, nail, etc. and internal elements like bone and nerves. Idioms employing words associated with internal organs (e.g., "a bone of contention", "a war of nerves", "have a bone to pick with someone", etc.) are particularly prevalent. This prevalence may be attributed to their significance in reflecting deeply rooted aspects of human experience and emotions. Internal organs, being integral to physiological and emotional states, provide a rich metaphorical scope for expressing complex interpersonal relations making them an apt means to express and symbolize a figurative shift, for example: "*Management guru Marcus Buckingham has a bone to pick with one of the prevailing trends in management wisdom – that companies need to get a lot better at giving tough, candid feedback, and need to do it a lot more often*" [12]. The phrase "a bone to pick" is metaphorical, with the "bone" representing a point of contention or dispute. In the provided example, Marcus Buckingham is described as having a bone to pick with a prevailing trend in management wisdom. This means that he harbors a specific criticism or disagreement with the widely accepted ideas or practices in management. The use of the idiom adds a figurative and expressive layer to the statement, implying that Buckingham is not just casually expressing a difference of opinion but rather has a significant and perhaps contentious issue that he wants to address or challenge.

Another group within this subcategory, represented by multiple examples, involves idioms utilizing terms denoting visible organs. The rationale behind this pattern is likely analogous to the previous one, visible organs serve as ideal conduits for expressing figurative shifts owing to their inherent connection to people's daily lives. These idioms include "be at each others' throats" and "fight tooth and nail", for instance: "*When you had a group of liberal elites down in Palm Beach that were deciding to be racist and anti-Semitic, it was Donald Trump that came to the rescue and said, 'I will fight tooth and nail for*

everybody to be a part of the club that I want to be down here', Republican National Committee spokesman Sean Spicer said on CNN last week" [12]. This idiom uses the metaphor of teeth and nails, which are physical tools used in close combat. "Tooth and nail" signifies a fierce and relentless struggle, emphasizing the use of every available means to engage in a conflict. Teeth and nails are associated with primal, physical confrontation, and using them as metaphors emphasizes the determined nature of the fight.

Two idioms are associated with the mental aspect of human thinking and interaction including "chop logic" and "agree to differ", for example: *"Donald Trump says he's an environmentalist; others beg to differ" [12]. "Agree to differ" expresses a mutual understanding between individuals who hold differing opinions. This idiom signifies a willingness to accept and respect each other's distinct perspectives on a particular matter without necessarily resolving or compromising on the disagreement.*

The idioms in the category "Artifacts" are inspired by a range of products originating from human activities. Each key term in these idioms represents common objects that we encounter regularly or utilize. This frequent interaction with these objects contributes to their heightened occurrence in idiomatic expressions. The idioms in this category are mostly derived from various types of clothing and accessories. Clothing has conventionally been viewed as a reflection, at least to some extent, of a person's character or preferences. This correlation between a person's personality or professional traits and their choice of clothing or accessories forms the basis for idiomatic expressions in this semantic area. Examples include idioms with the key lexemes like "wig" and "coat", where the connection between an individual's stature or influence and their attire is emphasized, for instance, "trail (or drag) your coat" – "deliberately provoke a quarrel or fight" [11, p. 297]. The idiom stems from the idea that if a person deliberately or accidentally lets their coat trail behind them, there is a chance someone might step on it, providing a person with an opportunity to initiate a confrontation or fight. This behavior was historically linked to Irishmen at Donnybrook Fair, an annual fair in a Dublin suburb.

The idiom "wigs on the green" is defined as "violent or unpleasant developments; ructions" [11, p. 312], for example: *"It wasn't long before the discussion escalated into a full-blown argument, and soon enough, it was wigs on the green as participants vehemently expressed their opposing views" [12]. The imagery conveyed in this idiom involves the idea of wigs being dislodged or pulled off during a brawl.*

The following idioms draw on the imagery of weapons to metaphorically convey situations involving disagreement, hostility, or confrontation: "at daggers drawn", "cross swords", "take up the cudgels", "at loggerheads", and "passage of arms". Each idiom captures a distinct facet of conflict, ranging from intense enmity to verbal clashes or passionate defense of a cause. For instance, "at daggers drawn" conveys a state of intense hostility or conflict between two parties. When individuals or groups are "at daggers drawn", they are in a situation of deep and bitter enmity, ready for a serious confrontation. The idiom "cross swords" signifies a verbal or metaphorical confrontation or conflict, often involving a disagreement or clash of opinions between two individuals or parties. When two parties are in a state of strong disagreement or conflict, unable to find common ground or reach an agreement, the idiom "at loggerheads" is commonly used, for instance: *"NBA players and NBA referees are at loggerheads" [12].*

The idioms containing head lexemes associated with sports, warfare, and physical struggles metaphorically convey situations involving intense effort, determination, and assertive actions. They include "go to the mat", "hold the ring", "cut and thrust" and "on the warpath". "Cut and thrust" is an idiomatic expression that originated from fencing terminology, specifically from traditional swordplay. In the literal fencing sense, "cut" refers to a slashing motion, while "thrust" is a stabbing motion using the pointed end of the weapon. Figuratively, the expression has been adopted into everyday language to describe a situation or conversation characterized by lively and dynamic exchanges, often involving both criticism (cutting remarks) and assertive statements or arguments (thrusts), for example: *"Raab added that voters had bigger issues to worry about than the account rebranding. "No one gives a toss about social media cut and thrust," he told the BBC" [12]. It signifies an active and back-and-forth interaction where participants are engaged in a spirited exchange of ideas, opinions, or verbal volleys, much like the swift and dynamic movements in a fencing match.*

The idiomatic expression "go to the mat" originates from wrestling, where the "mat" refers to the padded area used for matches. It metaphorically means to engage in a serious or decisive confrontation or struggle, often involving intense effort and determination, for example: *"Facebook chief executive Mark Zuckerberg told employees that the company was ready to "go to the mat and ... fight" if Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a leading Democratic presidential candidate, follows through on her vow to try to break*

up major technology firms, according to a leaked recording of his remarks published Tuesday" [12].

Human existence has consistently maintained a strong association with the natural environment that surrounds us. This is why many key terms in idioms are intertwined with these phenomena. This subcategory comprises idioms that are thematically linked to animals and other elements associated with them (such as horns, etc.). In these idioms, the figurative shift occurs by drawing connections between specific individuals or things and the characteristics or behavioral patterns of animals (e.g. "fight like cat and dog", "to lock horns"). This form of figurative shifting is among the most common and straightforward methods, for example: "U.S. and China lock horns at Asia's top security forum" [12]. The provided example demonstrates how the figurative use of "lock horns" metaphorically describes a conflict or confrontation between the United States and China in the context of a security forum. The idiom directly draws on the combative behavior of certain animals, adding vividness and clarity to the description of the conflict.

Another idiom with a natural association is "apple of discord". However, we categorize it within the group of idioms that draw from mythological or biblical references, alongside expressions like "battle of the giants" and "play devil's advocate", for example: "We, the consumers of health care, the little creatures of the forest, the nervous frogs and giddy birds – we watch the battle of the giants from the sidelines. We know our lives depend on the outcome" [12]. The idiom is used to create a vivid and metaphorical description. In this metaphor, the "battle of the giants" represents a significant and impactful conflict or struggle, and the observers, likened to creatures of the forest, are keenly aware that the resolution of this battle will directly affect

their lives. The idiom adds a layer of imagery and depth to the description of a monumental struggle, creating a connection between the mythological origins of the idiom and the contemporary context of health care and its impact on individuals.

The idioms within the subcategory "physical phenomena" originate from the domain of physics, where their key terms signify specific physical effects and properties. The pervasive connection of physics to nearly everything observed or experienced in daily life naturally extends into the realm of language finding its expression in the idioms "add fuel to the fire", "pour oil on troubled waters" and "sparks fly", for example: "The most recent unrest in Gaza will only add fuel to the fire – and add pressure on ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda to open an official investigation into those responsible for atrocities" [12]. In this figurative use, the phrase implies that the current situation in Gaza will exacerbate tensions or conflicts, adding more intensity to an already volatile situation.

Conclusions. The findings revealed distinct semantic categories, including idioms related to the human body, artifacts, nature, sports and warfare, and biblical and mythological references. Idioms featuring body parts, visible organs, and internal organs reflect deeply rooted aspects of human experience and emotions. The category related to artifacts explores the connection between common objects and idiomatic expressions, emphasizing the role of clothing and accessories in reflecting personality traits. The idioms involving nature and the world draw on imagery associated with animals and natural elements, providing vivid metaphors for various conflicts. Idioms inspired by sports, warfare, and physical struggles offer metaphorical expressions for intense effort, determination, and assertive actions.

REFERENCES:

1. Білоконенко Л. А. The conflict potential of Ukrainian and Russian phraseology with the value of deception. *Educatio* : науч. журнал. 2015. № 4 (11), ч. 3. С. 33–36.
2. Гарбера І. В. Конфліктогенність лексико-семантичних полів української й англійської фразеології. *Зап. з укр. мовознавства* : зб. наук. пр. 2022. Вип. 29. С. 36–45.
3. Коляда Е. Фразеологічні одиниці сучасної англійської мови на позначення динаміки конфлікту. *Науковий вісник Східноєвропейського національного університету імені Лесі Українки*. 2013. Вип. 17. С. 211–219.
4. Краснобаєва-Чорна Ж. До питання про конфліктну комунікацію: специфіка активної вербальної агресії у фразеології. *Slavia Orientalis*. 2021. Вип. LXX, No 2. С. 443–458
5. Ложкін Г. В., Пов'якель Н.І. Психологія конфлікту: теорія і сучасна практика : навч. посіб. К. : ВД «Професіонал», 2006. 416 с.
6. Cain K., Towse, A. S. & Knight R. S. The development of idiom comprehension: An investigation of semantic and contextual processing skills. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 2009. No. 102. P. 280–298.
7. Crystal D. A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics. John Wiley & Sons, 2011. 560 p.
8. Kovalyuk Y. The Role of Metaphor in Idiom Interpretation: Further Ruminations. *Science and Education a New Dimension*. Philology, VIII (64), Issue: 216, 2020. P. 37–40.

9. Kövecses Z. & Szabó P. Idioms: A View from Cognitive Semantics, *Applied Linguistics*, 1997. P. 326–355.
10. Langlotz A. Idiomatic Creativity: A Cognitive-linguistic Model of Idiom representation and Idiom-variation in English. Amsterdam: John Benjamin, 2006. 337 p.
11. Oxford Dictionary of Idioms/ Ed. By Judith Siefring. Oxford University Press, 2004. 352 p.
12. Washington Post. URL: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>