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Idioms – a Look into Culture. The Formation of English Idioms in the Framework of British Culture (1945-2020)

Summary

Introduction

The main objective of the thesis “Idioms – a Look into Culture. The Formation of English Idioms in the Framework of British Culture (1945-2020)”, is to present:

- how idioms reflect both the social and political situation as well as the mindset in a particular time, with emphasis placed on print media in the years 1945-2020;
- how idioms evolved with time having been affected by the cultural circumstances in a given period;
- how British print media have been aiding the process of coining new idioms and, in a broader sense, add new meanings reflecting new elements of contemporary culture.

Aims and objectives

The aim of the thesis is to research and probe how language universals reveal information about the connection between language and culture by exploring the application of idioms in print media. First, the ratio of frequency of idioms appearing in tabloids (*The Mirror*) to the frequency of idioms used in the quality press (*The Guardian*) in the years 1945-2020 is determined. In order to do so, this time stretch (1945-2020) is divided into seven consecutive time intervals. Out of each, ten samples of *The Mirror* and ten samples of *The Guardian* are chosen and correspondingly, major events of historical significance are analysed with a focus on idiom application. Furthermore, the question of whether the usage of idioms fluctuates due to the political correctness policy as represented and promoted by the publishers, or whether the coinage of idioms reflects changes in the political and economic situation is taken into consideration.

Methodology

The first part of the thesis deals with theoretical concerns.

Chapter one clarifies the term ‘idiom’ and presents various taxonomies (Hockett’s, Katz and Postal’s, Chafe’s, Weinreich’s, Fraser’s, Makkai’s, Newmeyer’s, Nunberg’s, Fernando and Flavell’s, Cacciari and Gluckberg’s, Mantyla’s); it also outlines the mechanisms of idiom formation (metaphor, analogy, metonymy and synecdoche, alliteration, aphorism, allusion, cliché), as well as the methods and approaches to studying idioms.

Chapter two presents classification of idioms by semantic field and place of occurrence as well as classification of idioms used by different social groups.

Chapter three examines the term ‘culture’ and deals with external and internal factors which aid the process of idiom formation. External factors such as aspects of migration and American influence are deliberated. At the same time, internal factors such as political correctness, impact of various subcultures and the Millennial generation as well as the concept of Snowflake Society is examined. In addition, the chapter presents political and economic situation in England in the years 1945-2020 divided into seven consecutive time blocks.

The nature of the thesis enables and requires the use of a wide range of methods and approaches. Synchronic and diachronic analyses are applied to the critical study of idioms. Culture is analysed from several distinct points of view, i.e. linguistics; cultural studies; the base and superstructure model, and the anthropological model where culture is defined as the sum total of a group’s way of life.

The second part of the thesis is devoted to the study of idioms in the context of social, economic and political changes and their role in the shaping of ‘Britishness’.

Chapter four demonstrates idioms obtained from quality papers (*The Guardian*) and from popular press (*The Mirror*) divided into seven decades (1945–1955, 1960–1970, 1970–1980, 1980–1990, 1990–2000, 2000–2010, 2010–2020). The articles chosen for analysis in respect to idiom application, reflect significant historical events from the field of economy, politics and social affairs. The same event is analysed for idiom usage in both newspapers – *The Mirror* and *The Guardian*. This chapter also presents results of quantitative (number of idioms per one article) and qualitative research (idiom type based on the source: metaphor, analogy, metonymy and synecdoche, alliteration, aphorism, allusion, cliché), conducted while examining the sources. The results are shown in a graphic form and the outcomes are presented in the conclusions.

Chapter four also offers a detailed analysis of selected examples of idioms with relevant cultural reference.

The final conclusions include the research findings as well as an alternative classification of idiomatic expressions taking into the consideration a cultural factor, together with examples.

Results

The quantitative analysis of idiom application in *The Mirror* and *The Guardian* produced some interesting findings. As it stands, quality press (*The Guardian*) uses idiomatic expressions more often than popular press (*The Mirror*). This tendency is connected to political and economic changes (migration, political correctness, Snowflake society), as well as changing character or the readership. Being able to access the newspaper on-line widens the potential consumer market. Further, it allows for active reading where anyone can leave an opinion or a comment under an article. This is an important detail as it leads to creating new idiomatic properties. Readers' comments are often sarcastic and use play on words (*The Mirror* leads here). On the other hand, qualitative research led to a new observation, namely the types of idioms used in both newspapers *The Mirror* and *The Guardian* - varied. The idioms mostly used in the quality press *The Guardian* were based on metaphor, while the idioms mostly used in the popular press *The Mirror* were based on metonymy and synecdoche.

Error analysis shows with 88% probability that there is a connection between the newspaper type (*The Mirror*, *The Guardian*) and the idiom type based on the source (metaphor, analogy, metonymy and synecdoche, alliteration, aphorism, allusion, cliché).

However, error analysis into connection between the newspaper type (*The Guardian*, *The Mirror*) and the type of idiom reflecting cultural elements in the best way (pure idioms, proverbial idioms, first base idioms, familiar quotations, binominal idioms, phrasal compounds, incorporating verb idiom) shows that there is only 53% probability of such a connection, meaning that it is insufficient to accept or reject such hypothesis, and more research is required.

Key words: idiom, idiom formation, characteristics and origins of English idioms, culture, circumstances influencing idiom formation, qualitative and quantitative analyses.

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Podpis: 