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**Abstract:** *This article is devoted to the investigation of idiomatic expressions and different viewpoints on idioms. It studies specific features, classification and structural patterns of idioms.*

**Key words:** *idiom, composable idioms and decomposable idioms, opaque and transparent idioms.*

Many world linguists were and still are interested in the study of idioms. And it is not a surprise, idiomatic language changes through the time and the very nature of these expressions is very complex. Linda and Roger Flavell, for instance, say that idioms are “anomalies of language, mavericks of the linguistic world. The very word idiom comes from the Greek idios, ‘one's own, peculiar, strange’. Idioms therefore break the normal rules.” As is mentioned before, there is not a single theory about what idioms really are. Palmer, for example, thinks of idioms in the context of other languages: “What is and what is not an idiom is, then, often a matter of degree . We could, perhaps, define idioms in terms of non-equivalence in other languages. They cannot be directly translated.”<sup>1</sup>

As has been pointed out in the definitions of some of the linguists cited above , idioms are multifaceted objects, and as such, they require various viewpoints and different methodological approaches. Cacciari concedes that idiomatization is a process, when a given structure is not idiomatic once and for all, but gradually acquires its idiomaticity. She further claims that “idioms are so internally heterogeneous that the generalization of one characteristic to the entire class of expressions can be highly problematic“.

There is a variety of criteria according to which idioms can be classified. Kvetko points to many different aspects that need to be taken into consideration in an attempt to carry out an overall classification. He mentions the semantic and constructional point of view, fixedness and variability, function, stylistics and etymology. However, the understanding of idioms by particular linguists varies and therefore different categorizations arise.

With regard to the compositionality of idioms Glucksberg offers the following division:

- **Non-compositional idioms** – there are no relations between the idiom's constituents and the idiom's meaning cannot be discerned

<sup>1</sup> Кунин, А.В. (1967) Англо-русский фразеологический словарь. Москва: Москва.

- **Partially compositional idioms** – there are some relationships between an idiom’s constituents and its idiomatic meaning can be discerned and exploited
- **Fully compositional idioms** – the constituents correspond directly with their idiomatic referents

Cacciari, following the same criteria, distinguishes among:

- **Normally decomposable idioms** that are analyzable and imply conventions whereby each of the idiom’s constituents can be used to refer to the idiomatic referent, e.g. (break the ice, pop the question)
- **Abnormally decomposable idioms** where we are able to identify this relation only by virtue of conventional metaphors that govern the mapping from constituents to idiomatic meanings, e.g. (hit the ceiling, throw in the sponge)
- **Nondecomposable idioms** that represent the group of opaque idioms

Kavka, however, sees the concept of compositionality in a different light. He considers free combinations as compositional, collocations as semi-compositional and idioms proper as non-compositional.

Based on the level of transparency, idioms can be classified according to the extent to which the meaning of an idiom can be derived from the meaning of its particular constituents. Glucksberg refers to:

- **Opaque idioms** - where the relations between an idiom’s constituents and its meaning may be opaque, but the meanings of individual words can nevertheless constrain both interpretation and use
- **Transparent idioms** - where there are one-to-one semantic relations between the idiom’s constituents and components of the idiom’s meaning.

Furthermore, Glucksberg introduces a quasi-metaphorical type of idiom, the meaning of which is conveyed through its allusional content. These idioms refer to an ideal exemplar of a concept providing at the same time a characterization of an event or situation as an instance of that concept.

The notion of the continuum from opacity to transparency leads Cacciari to come up with the following division of idioms:

- **Totally opaque idioms**
- **Retrospectively transparent idioms** – they become transparent once the speaker either knows the meaning or is reminded of the episode or setting that originated the idiom
- **Directly transparent idioms** – the senses of the words lead the speaker to the idiomatic meaning of the string (e.g. by means of the recreation of an analogical or metaphorical mapping)
- **Figuratively transparent idioms** – they are composed of other idioms, or parts that appear in other idioms or as metaphorical devices

Makkai (122) identifies two major types of idioms: encoding and decoding. Idioms of encoding compel the speaker to conform to a particular conventionalized way of speaking while retaining a relatively transparent interpretation, whereas the meaning of idioms of decoding is not so predictable. Idioms of decoding are classified as lexemic and sememic. He defines lexemic idioms as “any polylexonic lexeme which is made up of more than one minimal free form or (morphological) word, each lexon of which can occur in other environments as the realization of a monolexonic lexeme”.

According to Makkai, the lexemic idoms include:

- **Phrasal verbs** – the constituent structure of this type of idiom is always verb + adverb

- **Tournure idioms** – consist at least of three lexemes, having a compulsory it in a fixed position between the verb and the adverb
- **Irreversible binominal idioms** – defined as a formula consisting of parts A and B the order of which cannot be reversed
- **Phrasal compound idioms**
- **Pseudo-idioms** – all lexemic idioms one of whose constituents is a fossilized term that does not make any sense on its own, such as spic and span .

On the other hand, sememic idioms are considered to be of a higher and more abstract linguistic level. They correlate with institutionalized culturally pragmatic meanings and their purpose is mainly to express culture-bound notions, such as politeness, understatement etc. Makkai goes as far as to distinguish idioms of institutionalized politeness, detachment or indirectness, idioms of greetings and proposals encoded as questions.<sup>2</sup>

Taking into account the notion of invariability, Fernando offers a classification of idiomatic expressions as follows:

- **Pure idioms** – conventionalized, non-literal multiword expressions, the non-literal meaning is imposed on the idiom as a whole, e.g. spill the beans
- **Semi-literal idioms** – include one or more literal constituents where at least one has a non-literal subsense, e.g. foot the bill
- **Literal idioms** – meet the essential criterion for idioms, which is invariability or restricted variation, they are less semantically complex than pure and semi-idioms, e.g. on foot, on the contrary

In accordance with classification based on idiomatic classes, idioms can be divided into sentential and non-sentential (sayings and proverbs). The division can go even further sorting the idioms into verbal and verbless idioms, the latter ones being mainly nominal, adjectival and adverbial idioms.

Cowie's classification focuses not only on the syntactical and semantic features of phrasemes, but also on their pragmatic aspect, which indicates that the choice of an appropriate meaning of a lexical unit is reduced to one possibility only. Thus the ready made expressions like greetings, conversational formulae, proverbs, clichés or sayings, despite being semantically and syntactically compositional, are considered to be non-compositional pragmatically, being restricted to particular social or cultural concepts. In this respect Cowie (29) introduces pragmatic phrasemes or pragmatemes as opposed to the semantic phrasemes whose components are selectionally constrained or restricted by linguistic convention. He sets up three categories within semantic phrasemes that constitute:

- Full phrasemes, or idioms – e.g. shoot the breeze, pull sb's leg
- Semi-phrasemes, or collocations – e.g. crack a joke, give an ultimatum, launch an attack
- Quasi-phrasemes, or quasi-idioms – e.g. give the breast to sb., start a family

The fact that idioms can undergo a certain amount of variability shows that idioms have internal structure of some kind. Ifill (17) suggests that the structure of idioms is related to the structure of their non-idiomatic counterparts. He finds the rationale for this idea in the concept of possible

<sup>2</sup> Baker, Mona (1992) *In other words*. London: Routledge.

variability in passivization and modification. Thus he makes a distinction between transparent idioms whose syntactic structure is the same as their counterparts and opaque ones whose syntactic structure is different (Ifill 17). He further claims that since all idioms have internal structure, no idiom can be truly said to be fixed. However, the behaviour of idioms is affected by the way the structure relates to their non-idiomatic counterparts.

From the point of view of their construction, idioms can be divided into phrasal and sentence idioms. Phrasal idioms have the structure of a phrase of different types and are further subdivided into verbal (semi-clause idioms) and non-verbal idioms, while sentence idioms feature a complete sentence (clause) structure. The most frequent patterns of verbal idioms may be as follows:

Structures of verbal idioms	Examples of idioms
V + (Adj) + N (+N)	foot the bill
V + (sb's) N + Inf (+N)	have an axe to grind
V + Prep + N	play to the gallery
V + Adj	come clean
V + Adv (+Prep)	put up with
V + and + V	chop and change
V + like + (Adj/-ed) + N	sell like hot cakes
V + sb/sth/N + adjunct/compl	catch sb. napping, paint the town red
V + Adv (+Prep)	take off, put up with
V + Adv (+ Prep) + N	make up one's mind
V + N + Prep + N	have the ball at someone's feet

Table 1. Structures of verbal idioms

Non-verbal idioms have different syntagmatic structure and function as word classes representing nominal, adjectival or adverbial idioms (Kvetko, Frazelógia 39). As far as nominal idioms are concerned, these can take the following forms:

Structures of non-verbal idioms	Examples of idioms
Adj/-ed/-ing + N	blind alley, forbidden fruit
N + N	cupboard love
N's + N	bull's eye
(Adj+) N + Prep + N	storm in a tea cup
N + -ed/-ing + Compl	voice crying in the wilderness
N + and + N	part and parcel

Table 2. Structures of non-verbal idioms

Adjectival idioms, on the other hand, can be structured as:

Structures of adjectival idioms	Examples of idioms
(as) + Adj + as + N	as fit as a fiddle
Adj + and + Adj/-ed/-ing	high and mighty
Adj + Prep + N	wet to the skin
nice/good + and + Adj	nice and easy, good and angry

Table 3. Structures of adjectival idioms

The last group of adverbial idioms consists of the structures such as (Kvetko, Frazelógia 40):

Structures of adverbial idioms	Examples of idioms
N + N + and + N	hook, line and sinker
Adv + and + Adv	back and forth
Adv + Prep (+Adj) + N	once in a blue moon

Prep + N + Prep + N	from rags to riches
Prep + Adj + N	in the long run

Table 4. Structures of adverbial idioms

Moon makes even more detailed analysis of idiomatic expressions in her book *Fixed Expressions and Idioms in English: A corpus based approach*, where she deals with fixed expressions and idioms and refers to them as FEIs. She distinguishes between predicative FEIs, nominal groups, predicative adjectival groups, modifiers, adjuncts and sentence adverbials.

The most common structures of predicative FEIs Moon classifies as follows:

- Subject + predicator + object (X bends Y’s ear, X pulls X’s weight)
- Subject + predicator + object + adjunct (X brings Y to heal, X gets sth. off the ground)
- Subject + predicator + adjunct (X comes to grief, X sticks to X’s guns)
- Subject + predicator + complement (X’s days are numbered, sth. is not X’s cup of tea)
- Subject + predicator + adjunct + adjunct (X lives from hand to mouth, X comes up against a brick wall)
- Subject + predicator + complement + adjunct (X is a credit to Y, sth. is music to X’s ears)
- Subject + predicator + indirect object + direct object (X shows Y the door, X gives Y Y’s head)
- Subject + predicator + adjunct + object (X lets off steam, X throws in the towel)
- Subject + predicator + object + catenated predicator (X makes ends meet, X starts the ball rolling)
- Subject + predicator + object + object complement (X calls a spade a spade, X keeps X’s fingers crossed)
- Subject + predicator (sparks fly, the penny drops)
- Subject + predicator + object + adjunct + adjunct (X has sth. down to a fine art, X gives sth/Y up as a bad job)

Nominal groups are in Moon’s view rather problematic, since the boundary is not always clear between nominal FEIs and noun compounds (Moon 87). However, Moon (88) claims that FEIs, unlike nominal compounds, “tend to be fossilized in particular clause positions or to have restrictions on colligating determiners or prepositions“. According to her the syntagmatic, inflectional or collocational defectiveness provides a key to tell these two groups apart. Furthermore, she explains that nominal FEIs are metaphorical and evaluative rather than descriptive or denotative and provides the following distinction of nominal FEIs (88):

- Object or prepositional object (a clean sheet, the straight and narrow)
- Object or complement (a new lease of life, the salt of the earth)
- Complement or prepositional object (a wild goose chase, pie in the sky)

Due to the preference against the subject position it is assumed that nominal groups are connected with discoursal functions and convey new information and evaluations (Moon 89).

Predicative adjectival groups occur either postnominally or after a copula. Moon (89) points out that most FEIs that function as complements of copulas are nominal groups or prepositional phrases, but not adjectival groups, such as *bone idle*, *dressed to kill*, *long in the tooth*, *wide awake*.

Modifiers, i.e. FEIs that function in prenominal position, are rather limited. They include expressions such as quantifiers, deictics and adjectival modifiers, e.g. *any old*, *dim* and *distant*, *all-singing all-dancing*.

FEIs with a function of adjuncts include generally prepositional phrases, such as *in cold blood*, *by heart*, *under the weather*, *with one’s bare hands*, etc.

The last group of predicate FEIs is formed by sentence adverbials, where disjuncts (as attitude markers) slightly outnumber conjuncts (as boundary markers and connectors). Common disjuncts include by definition, in effect, no doubt, sooner or later, while common conjuncts involve idiomatic expressions such as for example, in other words, on the other hand, to cut a long story short, etc.

In conclusion, we are going to say that the idioms have special complex character which expresses different meaning in the context. We have just researched them according to the classification and structural patterns. We will try to study other characteristic features of idiomatic expressions in our next works.

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1. Baker, Mona (1992) *In other words*. London: Routledge.
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