BODY PARTS IDIOMS IN ENGLISH

Liliana Tronea-Ghidel

Assist. Prof., PhD, University of Craiova

Abstract: This paper is aimed at identifying how to accurately understand and interpret idioms related to the parts of the human body. As the human body has many parts, and it is not possible to include them all in one work, the present study only refers to idioms related to the external parts of the human body. Phraseology is an indivisible element of all the languages that speakers use. One of the fundamental aspects of the phraseological unit is idiomaticity. The term idiomaticity serves to designate that specialization or semantic lexicalization at its highest degree. This feature informs us that the full meaning of certain phraseological units is not deducible from the separate meaning of each of its constituent elements. Regarding the denotative meaning shown by the phraseological units, we distinguish between the literal denotative meaning and the translational denotative meaning, that is, idiomatic.

Keywords:idiom, idiomacity, figurative, literal, body parts.

Also, many phraseological units have more than one alternative variant, that is, they present some lexical variation. Thus, we have considered it necessary to study the external parts of the body, and focus on the arms, eyes, head, neck, feet, face and shoulders.

According to McCarthy and O'Dell (2002), "idioms are fixed expressions whose meaning is not immediately obvious from looking at the individual words". The same authors characterize idioms as follows:

- The main function of idioms is to paraphrase what is going on and what is being said.
- Idioms carry their own meaning and explanation.
- There are many idioms that relate to the parts of our body, such as eyes, head, etc.

The paper presents some idiomatic expressions based on parts of the body, the so-called *body parts idioms*, which frequently arise from certain associations. The English expressions with *face* are an example. For the British, the *face* is associated with a good reputation: *keep/lose face* or with the hiding of the true feelings: *put a brave/straight face.*

This is a list of English idioms classified alphabetically by the part of the body they refer to, explaining their meaning in English.

Idioms related to the body part *arm:*

- The long arm of the law = the power or authority of the police force.
- Be up in arms = to be very angry and make a great protest (about something).
- Chance one's arm = to do something risky; to take a risk.
- Cost an arm and a leg = used in order to say that something is very expensive.
- Somebody would give his/her right arm to do something = used in order to say that you want something very much, especially something that is difficult or impossible to get.
- Keep at arm's length = to avoid becoming too friendly with someone.
- Lay down one's arms = to surrender; to stop fighting or opposing other people.
- Someone's right arm = someone's main help and support.

- A shot in the arm = an encouraging stimulus, something that has a sudden and positive effect on something, providing encouragement and new activity.
- Take up arms = to become actively involved in a dispute, argument etc.
- Twist somebody's arm = to persuade someone to do something that they have said they do not want to do.

Idioms related to the body part *eye*:

- eye = (to eye) to consider as a possibility.
- all eyes are on somebody = used in order to say that people are giving someone or something a lot of attention.
- all my eye = simply not true.
- an eye for an eye (and a tooth for a tooth) = used to say that you should punish somebody by doing to them what they have done to you or to somebody else.
- the apple of (someone's) eye = a person or thing which is greatly loved (by someone)
- (Originally a term for the pupil of the eye).
- as far as the eye can/could see = to the horizon (where the sky meets the land or sea).
- bat your eyes/eyelashes = to open and close your eyes quickly, in a way that is supposed to be attractive.
- be all eyes = to be watching somebody/something carefully and with a lot of interest.
- a bird's eye view (of something) = a view of something from a high position looking down.
- catch someone's eye = to make someone notice one.
- clap/lay/set eyes on (someone or something) = to see (someone or something), especially for the first time.
- cock an ear/eye at something/somebody = to look at or listen to something/somebody carefully and with a lot of attention.
- cry one's eyes out = to weep bitterly.
- do something with your eyes shut/closed = to be able to do something very easily and well because you have done it very often.
- drop/lower your eyes = to move your eyes so that you are looking at a point lower than where you were looking before, especially because you are shy.
- easy on the eye = pleasant to look at.
- feast your eyes (on somebody/something) = to look at somebody/something and get great pleasure.
- for somebody's eyes only = to be seen only by a particular person.
- get your eye in = to practice so that you are able to make good judgements about a task or activity that you are doing.
- get stars in one's eyes =. to be very hopeful and excited about something and think that it will be much better or more enjoyable than it actually is.
- have an eye for something = to be able to judge if things look attractive, valuable, etc.
- have your eye on something = to be thinking about buying something.
- have eyes in the back of your head = to be aware of everything that is happening around, even things that seems difficult or impossible to see.
- have (got) eyes like a hawk = to be able to notice or see everything
- have one eye/ half an eye on something = to look at or watch something while doing something else, especially in a secret way so that other people do not notice.

- having a roving eye = to always be looking for the chance to have a new sexual relationship.
- the evil eye = the supposed power of causing harm by a look.
- an eyesore = something (especially a building) that is ugly to look at.
- in a twinkling of an eye = in a moment, immediately (a Biblical image from I Corinthians).
- in one's mind eye = in one's imagination.
- in the blink of an eye = very quickly; in a short time.
- in somebody's eyes = in somebody's opinion or according to the way that they see the situation.
- in the eyes of the law, world, etc. = according to the law, most people in the world, etc.
- in the public eye = well known to many people through television, newspapers, the internet, etc.
- keep an eye on (someone or something) = 1.to watch (someone or something) closely.
- 2. to look after (someone or something).
- keep a close eye/watch on somebody/ something = to watch somebody/something carefully.
- keep a weather eye open = to remain alert or watchful. (A nautical term - one's weather eye open for signs of difficulties ahead).
- keep one's eye skinned/ peeled = to watch carefully (for something).
- keep your ears open/eyes open (for somebody/something) = to listen or look out for somebody/something that you might hear or see.
- keep your eye on the ball = to continue to give your attention to what is most important.
- look somebody in the eye(s)/face = (usually used in negative sentences and questions) to look straight at somebody without feeling embarrassed or ashamed.
- make eyes at (someone) = to look at someone with sexual interest or admiration.
- make sheep's eyes = to look at someone in an admiring way because you are in love with them.
- meet somebody's eye(s)/ meet somebody's gaze, look, etc./ people's eyes meet = if you meet somebody's eye(s), you look directly at them as they look at you; if two people's eyes meet, they look directly at each other.
- my eye! = used to show that you do not believe somebody or something.
- your mind's eye = your imagination.
- the naked eye = the eye unassisted by spectacles, a telescope, a microscope etc.
- not to bat an eyelid = to appear to feel no surprise, distress etc.
- not to be able to take one eyes off (someone or something) = not to able to stop watching (something).
- not believe your ears/eyes = to be very surprised at something you hear/see.
- not see eye to eye with somebody (on something) = to not share the same views as somebody about something.
- one in the eye (for) = a direct rejection or refusal (for).
- only have eyes for somebody = to only be interested in or only love one person.
- open someone's eyes to something = to make someone see or understand (something of which they were not previously aware).
- please the eye = to be very attractive to look at.
- a private eye = a private detective (from the trademark of the Pinkerton Detective Agency).

- pull the wool over someone's eyes = to deceive (someone).
- see with half an eye = to see without difficulty.
- see/look at, etc. something through somebody's eyes = to think about or see something the way that another person sees it.
- shut/close your eyes to something = to pretend that you have not noticed something so that you do not have to deal with it.
- a sight for sore eyes = a most welcome sight.
- a smack in the eye = an insult or rebuff.
- square eyes = used about someone who has watched too much television.
- somebody's eyes are bigger than his/her stomach = used in order to say that someone has taken more food than they can eat.
- there's more to (something) than meets the eye = (something) is more complicated, or better, than it appears.
- turn a blind eye (to something) = to pretend not to see or notice (something).
- under the (watchful) eye of somebody = being watched carefully by somebody.
- what the eye doesn't see (the heart doesn't grieve over) = if a person does not know about something that they would normally think was bad, then it cannot hurt them.
- with an eye to the main chance = thinking about one's own chances of getting profit (out of something).
- with one's eyes open = with full awareness of what one is doing.
- with your eyes shut/closed = very easily, without thinking about it.

Idioms related to the body part *face*:

- At face value = as being as valuable as it appears; (literally, as being worth the value printed on the face of a coin, banknote, stamp).
- Be staring (someone) in the face = to be very obvious or easy (for someone) to see.
- Blow up in your face = if a situation blows up in your face, it suddenly causes lots of trouble or embarrassment or becomes very difficult to control.

Couldn't/wouldn't show your face = to feel too ashamed or embarrassed to go somewhere.

- Cut off one's nose to spite one's face = disadvantage oneself through a willful attempt to gain an advantage or assert oneself.
- Face someone down = to assert one's superiority over (someone).
- Fall flat on your face = to fail at something, often in a way that is embarrassing.
- Fly in the face of = if a plan, opinion, or way of behaving flies in the face of ideas that people think are acceptable, sensible, or true, it seems to ignore those ideas and is very different from them.
- Get out of my face = a rude expression used in order to tell someone who is annoying you to stop talking to you or to go away.
- In the face of something = if you do something or react in a particular way in the face of a problem, difficulty, or danger, you do it even though the situation is difficult or dangerous.
- In your face = used about a way of talking, behaving, dressing etc. that expresses ideas that are not the socially accepted ones, and does this in a very direct way that is often shocking or surprising.
- Lose face = to do something or have something done to you that embarrasses you and makes people lose respect for you.
- Put on a brave face = to try not to show that you are afraid, worried, disappointed, or upset about something.

- Save face = to do something that makes people continue to respect you, when something has happened that might have made them stop respecting you.
- Set your face against something = to be very determined that you will not do something or allow something to happen.
- Somebody is not just a pretty face = a humorous expression used in order to say that someone is intelligent or is good at their job.
- Something is written all over somebody's face = used in order to say that someone is intelligent or is good at their job.

Idioms related to the body part *head*:

- Above someone's head = too difficult for someone to understand.
- Bang one's head against a brick wall = to try in vain to make someone understand something, agree with one's point of view.
- Be a head case = to be crazy.
- Bite/snap someone's head off = to answer someone sharply and angrily.
- Bring (something) to a head, come to a head = to (cause something to) come to a state of climax or crisis when urgent action is needed.
- Bury one's head in the sand = to avoid trying to deal with a problem, danger by ignoring it deliberately knowing nothing about it. (From the old belief that the ostrich reacted to danger by burying its head in the sand, thinking that being unable to see it could not be seen).
- By a short head = by a very small amount.
- Can't make head or tail of something = used in order to say that you cannot understand something.
- Something does your head = used about a situation that makes you feel very annoyed or confused.
- Get (something) into (someone's) head = to make (someone) recognize that (something) is true, necessary.
- Give (someone) his head = to allow (someone) to do what they want in regard to something.
- Go to (someone's) head = to make (someone) arrogant, foolish, careless etc; of alcoholic drinks: to make someone slightly drunk, from the way in which alcohol in the body appears to behave.
- Hang one's head = to look ashamed or embarrassed.
- Have a head for (something) = to be good at dealing with something.
- Have a (good) head on one's shoulders = to be calm, clever, and sensible.
- Have a roof over one's head = to have somewhere to live.
- Have one's head in the clouds = to be dreaming and not attending to what is going on.
- Have one's head screwed on the right way = to behave sensibly.
- Head over heels = to feel a romantic love for someone so strongly that you do not care about anything else.
- Heads will roll = someone will get into serious trouble. (from the use of the guillotine to execute criminals).
- Hit the headlines = to attract a great deal of attention and interest from the newspapers, television.
- Hold a pistol to someone's head = to force someone to do as one wishes, by using threats.
- Hold one's head up = not to feel ashamed, guilty.
- Keep a cool head = to stay calm and reasonable even though you are in a difficult situation or other people are upset.
- Keep one's head = to remain calm and sensible, in a crisis or sudden difficulty.

- Keep one's head above water = to get or earn enough money, profits to remain out of debt.
- Knock (something) on the head = to destroy or put an end to a plan etc.
- Laugh/ scream your head off = to laugh, scream a lot for a long time.
- Lose one's head = to become angry or excited, or to act foolishly, in a crisis or sudden difficulty, or when someone does something wrong.
- Make headway = to go forward; to make progress.
- Need one's head examined = to be foolish, stupid or slightly insane.
- Not quite right in the head = slightly mad.
- Not to be able to make head or tail of something = to be unable to understand something.
- Off/out of one's head = mad.
- Off the top of one's head = without much thought; without making sure that what is said is correct.
- On your own head be it = you will bear the responsibility for any harm caused by your actions or wishes.
- (Be/go) over someone's head = in a way which is too difficult for someone to understand; when others seem to have a better right to something.
- A price on someone's head = a reward offered for someone's capture or killing.
- Put one's head on the block/ in a noose = to put oneself into a position where one could easily be harmed.
- Put our heads together = to discuss a plan, problem etc. among ourselves.
- Rear its ugly head = to appear or happen (used of something unpleasant or unwelcome).
- Soft in the head = stupid or unintelligent.
- Take it into one's head = to come to believe, usually wrongly, that something is true; to decide to do something foolish.
- Talk one's head off = to talk a great deal.
- Talk through the back of one's head = to talk complete nonsense.
- turn someone's head = to make someone conceited.
- Two heads are better than one = a saying meaning that two people working together are more likely to be able to find a solution to a problem than one person alone.

Idioms related to the body part *mouth*:

- By word of mouth = by one person telling another in speech, not in writing.
- Down in the mouth = miserable or in low spirits.
- Foam at the mouth = to be extremely angry.
- Have a big mouth = to be in the habit of talking too loudly or too much, or of saying things one shouldn't.
- Put one's money where one's mouth is = to supply money for a purpose which one has been saying one supports.
- Shoot one's mouth off = to talk in a careless, loud, or boastful manner.
- Shut/stop someone's mouth = to make someone be quiet, especially about something secret.
- Straight from the horse's mouth = used to say that information has come directly from the person who knows the most about a situation.
- Somebody is all mouth and no trousers = used to say that someone, especially a man, never behaves in the way that he says he will.

Idioms related to the body part *neck*:

- Be in something up to one's neck = very much and very seriously involved in something bad.

- Breathing down someone's neck = 1. Close behind someone.
  - 2. extremely impatient.
- A millstone round someone's neck = something that is a heavy burden or responsibility to (someone) and prevents easy progress.
- Risk one's neck = to do something that puts one's life, job in danger.
- Stick one's neck out = to take a risk.
- Talk through the back of one's neck = to talk complete nonsense.
- Neck and neck = (in a race) exactly equal.
- This, that neck of the woods = a particular place or part of the country.
- A pain in the neck = a person who is constantly annoying.
- Have the brass neck to = to be sufficiently shameless and impudent to do something unacceptable.

Idioms related to the body part *nose*:

- As plain as the nose on your face = used in order to say that something is very easy to realize, see or understand.
- Brown nose = a rude expression meaning to try and make someone in a position of authority like you by being nice to them.
- Somebody can't see beyond (the end) of his/her nose = used in order to say that someone is too interested in themselves and their own lives to understand or deal with other situations or other people's problems.
- Do something with your nose in the air = to behave as if you are better than someone else.
- Follow your nose = 1. To behave in a way that you think is best or right, often in a situation in which
  - there are no rules.
  - 2. to keep going straight ahead.
- Get/put somebody's nose out of joint = to annoy someone by not giving them as much respect as they think they deserve.
- Get (right) up your nose = to annoy you very much by saying or doing something.
- Be given a bloody nose = to be defeated or made to fail in a way that you did not expect and that makes you seem weak or stupid.
- Have a nose for something = to be naturally good at noticing or finding a particular type of thing.
- Have a nose round = to look around a place or to look for something, especially when it is someone else's place, and you are not supposed to be there.
- Have/keep your nose to the grindstone = to work very hard for a long time without thinking about anything else.
- Hold your nose = to accept that you have to do something that you do not want to do, because you feel you do not have a choice.
- Lead somebody around by the nose = to control someone completely so that they do everything you want them to do, especially in a way that makes the person seem stupid.
- Look down your nose (at) = to behave as if someone or something is not good enough for you.
- Pay through the nose = to pay a lot or too much for something.
- Powder your nose = used by women to say that they want to go to the toilet, in order to avoid saying this directly, often used humorously.
- Be right (there) under somebody's nose = used in order to say that something that someone cannot find or understand is really very easy to find or understand.

- Rub somebody's nose in it = to keep reminding someone about something they do not want to think about, especially something that makes them feel ashamed or embarrassed.
- Stick your nose into something = to become too involved in, or show too much interest in, someone else's private life or affairs, so that they become annoyed or angry.
- Thumb your nose (at) = to show that you do not respect rules, laws, or people in authority.

Idioms related to the body part *shoulder*:

- Give someone the cold shoulder = to show that one is unwilling to be friendly with someone by deliberately ignoring them.
- Have a chip on one's shoulder = to have rather an aggressive manner, as if always expecting to be insulted, ill-treated.
- Have broad shoulders = to be able to accept a great deal of responsibility.
- Rub shoulders with someone = to mix or associate with someone.
- Somebody is looking over his/her shoulder = used in order to say that someone is very worried or being very careful because they expect that something dangerous or unpleasant may happen to them.
- Put your shoulder to the wheel = to start to work with great effort and determination.
- A shoulder to cry on = used about someone whom you can tell about your problems and ask for sympathy and advice.
- Shoulder to shoulder = 1. If people are standing shoulder to shoulder, they are close together.
  - 2. used in order to say that people are working together in an attempt to
    - achieve something or defend something.
- Straight from the shoulder = if you tell someone something straight from the shoulder, you talk in a direct and truthful way, though you may have to say something unpleasant.

To summarize, it is safe to say that idioms related to the body parts *eyes* and *head* prevail.

Some of them might have fallen out of use, while others have become clichés, but idioms are still constantly used in both spoken and written English. It may seem that the object of study of this article is very limited since it focuses only on idiomatic expressions. Nonetheless, it leaves the door open to possible proposals for exploring other lexical units such as proverbs, collocations, metaphors or simply words.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allsop, J. and Woods, L.1992. *Engleza pentru toți. Idioms.*Teora.

Coulson, S. 2001. *Semantic leaps: Frame shifting and conceptual blending in meaning construction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dictionary of English Idioms.1998. Longman: Longman Group Limited.

McCarthy, Michael and O'Dell, Felicity. 2003. *English Idioms in Use*. Third printing. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mieder, Wolfgang. 2004. Proverbs: A Handbook. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Pustejovsky, J. 1995. The Generative Lexicon. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Speake, Jennifer. 2015. Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs. New York, Oxford University Press.

Spears, Richard. (1991). NTC's Dictionary of American Slang and Colloquial Expressions. Chicago: National Textbook Company.

Online sources
https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/
https://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/