

Ministry Of Education And Science Of Ukraine
Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv
Educational and Scientific Institute of Philology
Department of English Philology and Intercultural Communication

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CULTURALLY SPECIFIC IDIOMS IN AMERICAN ENGLISH
(based on dictionaries)



Maria Ratnikova

4th year student of the Education Program

‘English Studies and Translation
and Two Western European Languages’

Field of science: 03 “Humanities”

Specialty: 035 “Philology”

Supervised by:

Borysovykh Oksana

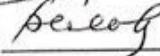
Associate professor

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ABSTRACT

This study examines idioms as linguistic and cultural phenomena in American English. The objective of the research is to analyze culturally-specific idioms in American English, focusing on their semantic, pragmatic and sociocultural features and on how they reflect cultural values, historical context, and social practices in contemporary American society.

The research methodology integrates descriptive, comparative, semantic, cognitive and linguocultural approaches to the analysis of idioms. The theoretical foundation for this research is grounded in the works of David Crystal, Adam Makkai, Chitra Fernando, Rosamund Moon, George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, Zoltán Kövecses, Farzad Sharifian, Anna Wierzbicka, Gary B. Palmer and Alexander Potebnja. The lexicographic sources and idiom dictionaries used in the analysis include Oxford English Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of English Idioms, The Free Dictionary by Farlex, Merriam-Webster: America's Most Trusted Dictionary, American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms, McGraw-Hill's essential American idioms dictionary and UsingEnglish.com. Idioms were categorized based on grammatical, semantic, stylistic, etymological and cultural dimensions.

The research indicates that American English idioms are deeply rooted in such aspects of national culture as individualism, pragmatism, the American dream, holidays, sports, politics, food and entertainment. The theoretical novelty of the research includes the comprehensive linguistic, cognitive, cultural and sociolinguistic analysis of idioms and the classification of modern American English idioms.

The significance of the research lies in the applicability of its findings to courses in lexicology, intercultural communication and English language teaching.

Key words: idiom, American English, cultural component, classification

АНОТАЦІЯ

У цьому дослідженні ідіоми розглядаються як лінгвістичні та культурні явища в американському варіанті англійської мови. Метою дослідження є аналіз культурно специфічних ідіом в американському варіанті англійській мові з урахуванням їх семантичних, прагматичних та соціокультурних особливостей, а також того, як вони відображають культурні цінності, історичний контекст і соціальні практики сучасного американського суспільства.

Методологія дослідження ґрунтується на використанні описового, порівняльного, семантичного, когнітивного та лінгвокультурологічного підходів до аналізу ідіом. Теоретичну основу цього дослідження становлять праці таких лінгвістів як David Crystal, Adam Makkai, Chitra Fernando, Rosamund Moon, George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, Zoltán Kövecses, Farzad Sharifian, Anna Wierzbicka, Gary B. Palmer та Alexander Potebnja. Лексикографічні джерела та фразеологічні словники, використані в аналізі, включають Oxford English Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of English Idioms, The Free Dictionary by Farlex, Merriam-Webster: America's Most Trusted Dictionary, American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms, McGraw-Hill's Essential American Idioms Dictionary та UsingEnglish.com. Ідіоми були класифіковані за граматичними, семантичними, стилістичними, етимологічними та культурними параметрами.

Дослідження показує, що ідіоми, як використовуються в американському варіанті англійської мови, глибоко вкорінені в таких аспектах національної культури, як індивідуалізм, прагматизм, американська мрія, свята, спорт, політика, їжа та розваги. Теоретична новизна дослідження полягає у комплексному лінгвістичному, когнітивному, культурологічному та соціолінгвістичному аналізі ідіом, а також у класифікації сучасних ідіом американського варіанта англійської мови.

Практичне значення дослідження полягає у можливості застосування його результатів у курсах лексикології, міжкультурної комунікації та англійської мови.

Ключові слова: ідіома, американський варіант англійської мови, культурологічний компонент, класифікація

INTRODUCTION

Language has always been more than a simple means of communication. It stores collective memory, expresses the national character and embodies the world perception of society through words, symbols and figurative expressions. One of the most interesting and vivid examples of figurative language usage is idiom - a set phrase whose meaning goes far beyond the literal meaning of its constituent parts. The use of idioms enriches speech and adds color to it, but besides that, idioms disclose cultural heritage, historical experience, social attitude and value system inherent in the speakers of the language [7; 12; 46; 51; 57; 65].

American English, developed through various transformations, under the influence of multiculturalism, politics and technological advancement, is known for its unique and colorful idiomatic expressions. American idioms are a reflection of the changes that have taken place in the U.S., from the time when it was colonized till the present day when it is one of the dominant cultures of the world.

The object of the study is culturally-specific idioms in American English.

The subject of the research involves peculiarities of semantics, structure and etymology of American idioms.

The relevance of the research is conditioned by the increase in popularity of the connection between language and culture in modern linguistics. The idioms carry historical and cultural knowledge, therefore, idioms become a vital object for linguistic studies.

The aim of this study is to examine idioms used in American English as a reflection of the nation's identity, history and culture.

The following **objectives** were determined in this paper:

- to describe the idiom as a linguistic phenomenon and point out its semantic, structural and pragmatic features;
- to provide an analysis of different typologies of idioms;
- to establish the connection between language, culture and cognition;

- to identify identify the core ideas and values inherent in American culture that find expression in idioms;
- to explore the origin and functions of idioms pertaining to American history, politics, cuisine, holidays, sports and entertainment;

The practical value of the research is determined by the possibility of using its outcomes within the frameworks of teaching lexicology, phraseology, cultural linguistics and intercultural communication classes. At the same time, results can also be applied by teachers and philology students while working with authentic sources in the English language.

The study material consists of a wide range of lexicographic sources, including Oxford English Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of English Idioms, The Free Dictionary by Farlex, Merriam-Webster: America's Most Trusted Dictionary, In the loop: a reference guide to American English idioms, American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms, a boatload of idioms: over a thousand English expressions and UsingEnglish.com., as well as modern political rhetoric and literary examples. During the research, a total of 202 American idioms were analysed.

The structure of the work consists of the following parts: abstract, introduction, two chapters, conclusions, references, lexicographic sources and appendix.

1. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF IDIOMS

1.1. Idiom as a linguistic unit and its general characteristics

The primary tool we use to express what we think, feel and experience in life is language. Still, words taken literally do not always enough to convey the complexities of emotions or situations or abstract ideas. The speakers in these cases, often tend to come up with figurative language (metaphors/symbolic expressions). Idioms are the most common types of figurative language and researchers estimate that there are about twenty-five thousand idiomatic expressions in the English language [45; 47; 64].

The word idiom has a long historical background. It traces its origins through the Middle French “idiome” and the classical Latin “idiōma”. In post-classical Latin contexts - dating from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries in various British and European manuscript sources - the term denoted a special term, a peculiarity, a specific regional dialect, or a spoken form of language peculiar to a particular sociological group. These Latin and French terms are themselves descendants of the Hellenistic Greek “idiōma”, meaning a peculiarity or specific property of style and the ancient Greek verb “idioūsthai”, meaning “to make one's own” or “to appropriate”. This ancient verb is rooted in the base word “idios”, which translates to “own”, “private” or “peculiar” [29; 74].

The evolution of idioms goes hand in hand with the evolution of language and culture. A lot of idioms have been around since times and they show what life was like what people believed in and what they went through back then. Many English idioms actually come from Greek and Roman culture [30]. The stories and myths from Greece and Rome had an impact on the languages spoken in Europe. For instance, the idiom Achilles' heel meaning a person's weakness is inspired by the myth of the Greek hero Achilles. Another idiom such as Midas touch means someone who makes money or gets rich easily - is taken from the story of King Midas, who was given the powers to turn anything he touched into gold. Other idioms such as Herculean task, or Sisyphean

task originate from ancient myths and are used to refer to difficult or never-ending tasks [30; 54].

There were also many idioms created in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period. Literature has been very important for idioms to develop. Chaucer, a 14th-century author who significantly influenced the English language and wrote in a way which reflected common speech. Some of his phrases, such as *through thick and thin* (thurgh thikke and thurgh thenne) and *as busy as a bee* (ay as bisy as bees), are still in use [13; 47].

Geoffrey Chaucer made English a language for writing. Then William Shakespeare greatly expanded the English language. William Shakespeare wrote a lot in the 1600s and early 1700s. This time is called Modern English. At that time the English language was still developing. There were no standardised dictionaries and the rules of grammar were not firmly established. As a result, Shakespeare was really able to experiment with language. That is what made his writing so special. He invented idioms and used words, in many different manners. [55; 62]. His impact was significant. For example, Shakespeare's plays and poems use around 30,000 different words, while the King James Bible uses only about 8,000. Around 1,500 - 1,700 of these were invented or popularised by Shakespeare according to linguists [6]. Examples include *break the ice*, *wild-goose chase*, *come full circle* and *laughing stock*. Because Shakespeare's works were widely performed and read, these phrases quickly became part of everyday language.

In later centuries, other writers also influenced the development of idioms. For example, the works of Charles Dickens described everyday life in Victorian England and introduced expressions such as *butter-fingers* [4]. Some of his characters' names even became idioms, such as *Scrooge*, which is now used to describe a greedy person. Writers of fantasy literature, such as Lewis Carroll, also helped popularize imaginative expressions like *Mad Hatter* and reinforced idioms such as *when pigs fly* [4; 20].

Idioms have long been recognised as a distinct topic within linguistics. Today, it focuses on the study of lexically inseparable word combinations [2]. Thus, knowledge

of the concept of the idiom, also known as a phraseological unit, is necessary for the study of phraseological units in modern English.

In linguistic terms, an idiom is a collection of words whose meaning cannot be derived from the meanings of each of its components. It can also relate to an individual's or group's distinctive way of expressing themselves. Idioms are language-specific, making them difficult to translate properly [1; 7].

Linguistic and lexicographic research offers numerous definitions of the term idiom. These definitions differ in focus and terminologies, but they share a few fundamental characteristics. According to David Crystal's "A First Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics" (1980), an idiom is "a sequence of words which is semantically and often syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit" [69]. From a semantic perspective, Crystal emphasises that the meanings of separate words cannot be simply combined to form the complete meaning of an idiomatic utterance. From a syntactic perspective, idioms frequently prevent grammatical variation that might otherwise be allowed in non-idiomatic contexts. For example, an expression such as "It's raining cats and dogs" cannot be changed in number or word order without losing its idiomatic meaning [69]. Crystal additionally outlines two essential features that define idioms. First, their meanings cannot be inferred from the meanings of their constituent lexemes. Second, idioms are fixed grammatically and lexically. In other words, the expression "Put a sock in it!" means "stop talking" and any swap of its components (e.g. put a stocking in it) either undermines the idiomatic meaning or demands a literal interpretation [70]. A similar definition is provided by the Longman Dictionary of English Idioms, which describes an idiom as "a fixed group of words with a special meaning that is different from the meanings of the separate words" [71]. The dictionary illustrates this point with the idiom *spill the beans*, whose idiomatic meaning ("to reveal a secret") bears no direct relation to the literal meaning of beans. The Oxford English Dictionary definition, which is frequently referred to as a classical definition, closely resembles the ones previously described. It defines an idiom as "the specific character or individuality of a language; the manner of expression considered

natural to or distinctive of a language; a language's distinctive phraseology” [74]. However, this definition has grown to become rather archaic, it emphasises the close connection between idioms and a language's distinctive expressive character.

All the definitions mentioned above emphasise how difficult it is to determine an idiom's meaning from the literal meanings of each of its components. The literal interpretations of the words that make up an idiomatic term are not the same as its semantic meaning. Furthermore, idioms are often characterised by grammatical peculiarities and by a fixed, socially established pattern of usage.

On the basis of these features, an idiom may be analysed from three main characteristics [33]:

- Semantic characteristic - idioms have a non-literal meaning, which means that the sense of the expression as a whole cannot be understood from the meanings of its individual words.
- Structural characteristic - idioms tend to have a fixed grammatical form and allow little or no variation in their structure.
- Pragmatic characteristic - idioms are socially established expressions that are learned and used as ready-made units in communication. They are accepted and understood within a speech community as complete phrases.

Thus, an idiom is defined as a fixed multi-word expression with a metaphorical meaning that cannot be explained only by the meanings of its separate components. These three elements are widely recognised and often touched on together in linguistic study, despite the fact that researchers may differ in how they interpret specific aspects of idiomaticity [12; 33; 69; 70; 74].

Some idioms in American English and British English have both literal and idiomatic meanings. These idioms are widely known on both sides of the continent and serve comparable purposes in communication, despite regional variations in usage and frequency [12]. For example, “*break the ice*” literally refers to breaking a layer of ice, such as on a frozen surface. Idiomatically, it refers to starting a conversation or doing action that decreases social tension. The literal image and figurative meanings are equivalent in both types of English and the idiom is commonly employed in both

informal and formal settings. The idiom “*on thin ice*” is also common in American and British English. In its literal sense, it refers to standing or walking on ice that is not sufficient in thickness to be safe. Idiomatically, it refers to being in a risky or dangerous situation, particularly one where criticism or punishment is likely. The metaphor of physical risk is present in both kinds [12].

1.2. Classification of idioms

Linguists started considering idioms more seriously after the mid-twentieth century [44]. According to research in phraseology, corpus linguistics and cognitive linguistics, idioms are not exceptions, but a typical and necessary feature of each language. They link language, grammar, meaning and social interaction [12; 33; 45]. That explains why the complexity of idioms makes them difficult to classify. Idioms differ in terms of their meaning, structure and function in communication. This has led linguists to suggest a wide range of systems of classification. For instance, Adam Makkai classifies idioms into two primary groups based on where idiomaticity occurs in the linguistic system: lexemic and sememic idioms [44].

Lexemic idioms are multi-word expressions that have the same meaning and function as single words. Adam Makkai identified six structural categories for these idioms:

Table 1

№	Type of lexemic idiom	Structural form	Key features	Example
1.	Phrasal verb idioms	Verb + participle (adverb or preposition)	The overall meaning is not fully predictable from individual words	To carry on (continue); To run into (meet unexpectedly); To turn down (reject).

2.	Tournure idioms	Complex verbal phrase (three or more words)	Contains a compulsory element (e.g. it, article) with no real referent: cannot be omitted	To lose one's temper (become angry); To take the plunge (make a bold decision); To bite the dust (fail or die); To spill the beans (reveal a secret); To brazen it out (face a difficult or embarrassing situation boldly); To see it through (complete something to the end); To live it up (enjoy life in an extravagant or carefree way).
3.	Irreversible binomial idioms	Pair of words joined by a conjunction (usually "and")	Fixed order; reversing the order destroys the idiomatic meaning	By and large (generally speaking); Give and take (mutual compromise); Law and order (social stability); Trial and error (learning by repeated attempts);

				Hook or crook (by any means necessary).
4.	Phrasal compound idioms	Usually adjective + noun	Written as separate words but functions as one lexical item with idiomatic meaning	Black market (illegal trade); Red tape (excessive bureaucracy); Blue moon (a very rare event); White lie (a harmless or small lie); Dark horse (secretive person who unexpectedly wins or succeeds).
5.	Incorporating verb idioms	Single verb containing a noun/adjective element	Internal component creates a distinct idiomatic meaning	To eavesdrop (listen secretly); To whitewash (cover up or gloss over); To babysit (look after a child); To snowball (increase rapidly), To spotlight (draw attention to)
6.	Pseudo-idioms	Expression containing a non-independent element	Includes a “cranberry morpheme” (a form with no	Higgledy-piggledy (in a messy or chaotic way);

			separable meaning in modern English)	Hocus-pocus (tricks used to deceive or words used to hide what is happening); Kith and kin (people you are connected with, especially by family relationships); To and fro (in one direction and then in the opposite direction).
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Sememic idioms are expressions whose meaning is idiomatic at the level of the whole utterance. Makkai also classifies nine main types of sememic idioms [44]:

Table 2

№	Type of lexemic idiom	Structural form	Key features	Example
1.	“First Base” idioms	Fixed verbal expression	They have cultural roots and they are widespread throughout the world, but people use them with little understanding of their origin.	To throw in the towel (give up); To be in the driver’s seat (be in control); To move the goalposts (change rules unfairly)

2.	Idioms of institutionalized politeness	Interrogative sentence	Functions as a polite request rather than a real question	“Would you mind giving me a hand?”; “Could you pass the sugar?”; “Could I trouble you for a glass of water?”
3.	Idioms of institutionalized detachment or indirectness	Declarative sentence with hedging verbs	Creates emotional distance; expresses caution, reluctance, or politeness	“There seems to be some confusion.”; “It appears that we have a problem.”; “I seem to have misplaced my keys.”
4.	Idioms of proposals encoded as questions	Interrogative sentence	Grammatically a question but semantically a suggestion or offer	“Shall we begin?”; “Why don’t you take a break?”; “How about going for a walk?”
5.	Idioms of institutionalized greeting	Set expressions	Used in routine social interaction for greeting or parting	“Nice to meet you.”; “How do you do?”; “Goodbye.”
6.	Proverbial idioms with a moral	Complete sentence (proverb)	Expresses general truth, advice, or moral lesson	“Actions speak louder than words.”; “Better late than never.”; “Every cloud has a silver lining.”

7.	Familiar quotations as idioms	Quotation functioning as a sentence	Well-known literary or historical quote used idiomatically	“To be or not to be.”; “All that glitters is not gold.”; “The die is cast.”; “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.”
8.	Idiomaticity in institutionalized understatement	Mild declarative sentence	Deliberately weakens evaluation to soften criticism or reaction	“It could have been worse.”; “Not my favorite.”; “I’ve seen better.”
9.	Idiomaticity in institutionalized hyperbole	Exaggerated declarative sentence	Fixed expressions using strong exaggeration for emphasis or emotion	“I’ve told you a thousand times.”; “I’m so hungry I could eat a horse.”; “This bag weighs a ton.”; “She cried a river.”

Makkai’s work is significant because it shows that idiomaticity is not just about expressions or poorly understood phrases. It is about the whole linguistic spectrum – from a single compound verb to an entire polite social interaction. In addition, his taxonomy is regarded as one of the most thorough structural analyses of English idioms [44].

Another classification of idioms according to their grammatical function was analyzed by W. McMordie in his book “English Idioms and How to Use Them” (1929) [46]. He comprehensively distinguished them into three categories:

Table 3

№	Category	Grammatical function	Structural form	Example
1.	Verbal idioms	Acts as the predicate of a sentence	Verb + noun	To hit the ceiling (become very angry); To draw the line (set a limit); To face the music (accept punishment or criticism); To burn bridges (destroy relationships permanently); To break the ice (reduce tension; start conversation).
2.			Verb+ preposition	To give up (stop trying); To run out of (have no more of something); To come up with (think of an idea); To get over (recover from something); To bring up (mention a topic; raise a child).
3.			Verb + adjective	To go crazy (become very angry or excited);

				To run wild (behave without control); To lie low (stay hidden; avoid attention); To play safe (avoid taking risks); To sit tight (wait patiently).
			Verb + adverb	To back off (withdraw; stop being aggressive); To hold on (wait; not give up); To put up with (tolerate something unpleasant); To slow down (reduce speed or activity); To carry on (continue).
	Nominal idioms	Acts as noun	Noun + noun	Cash cow (a steady source of profit); Rat race (stressful competitive lifestyle); Gold mine (something very valuable);

				Brain drain (loss of skilled workers to other places); Chain reaction (series of events caused by one event).
			Adjective + noun	A hot potato (a controversial issue); A big shot (an important person); A loose cannon (an unpredictable person); A tough cookie (a strong, resilient person); A cold case (an unsolved crime).
			Noun + prepositional phrase	A pain in the neck (an annoying person or thing); A drop in a bucket (a very small amount); A fish out of water (someone who feels uncomfortable); A twist of fate (an unexpected change of events);

				A slap in the face (a strong insult).
	Prepositional idioms	Acts as an adjective or adverb	Preposition + noun phrase	At all costs (no matter what); In the long run (over a long period); Out of the blue (suddenly; unexpectedly); At sixes and sevens (in confusion or disorder); In a nutshell (briefly; in a few words).

McMordie’s classification is essential because we can understand the functional nature of idiomatic expressions. He demonstrates that idioms operate as standard parts of speech – functioning as verbs, nouns or modifiers within a sentence [46].

Chitra Fernando established another classification. She focuses on the function of idioms rather than its grammatical structure [21]. According to her book “Idioms and Idiomacity” (1996) she classifies idioms into three types:

- Pure idioms
- Semi-idioms
- Literal idioms

Pure idioms are non-literal, opaque and their meaning is ambiguous and cannot be easily deduced. For example, *to kick the bucket* (to die), *to hit the road* (to leave), *to jump the gun* (to act too early), *to bite the bullet* (to endure something difficult). In pure idioms the literal words do not directly reveal the figurative sense.

In **semi-idioms** one component is literal and the other is figurative, making it easier to comprehend the meaning. For instance, *to lose face* (to lose respect), *to hold a grudge* (to keep resentment), *to lose one's temper* (to become angry) [21].

The last Chitra's type is **literal idioms** where the meaning is entirely transparent and can be understood from the individual components of the expression such as “on the other hand”, “in meantime”, “on the contrary”, “by the way” [21].

In her work she shows how much of the meaning we can “see” through the words. Instead of looking at grammar, she looks at the relationship between the literal words and their grammatical meaning.

Moreover, idioms can be explored by stylistic register and one of the most prominent scholars who focused on that was Rosamund Moon. In her the book “Fixed Expressions and Idioms in English: A Corpus-Based Approach” (1998) she analyzed a large collection of real texts and found that idioms are used in different styles and grouped them as: formal (literary), informal (colloquial) and neutral [48].

Table 4

№	Register	Function	Context	Example
1.	Formal (literary) idioms	Used to convey politeness, authority and intellectual seriousness.	Academic journals, journalism, legal documents, official correspondence, formal speeches	To bear fruit (produce results; be successful); To whom it may concern (formal phrase used when the reader is unknown); In the light of the fact (considering that; because of); To pave the way (make something easier or possible);

				By virtue of (because of; due to);
2.	Informal (colloquial) idioms	Expresses the speaker's attitude and emotions	Everyday conversation, informal fiction, social media, texting.	A piece of cake (something very easy); To spill the tea (reveal gossip or secrets); To shoot the breeze (chat casually about trivial matters); To blow one's top (suddenly become very angry);
3.	Neutral idioms	Serve as standard expressions for basic communication	Both spoken and written language and used in most communicative situations.	To take place (happen; occur); At least (not less than; if nothing else); To make sense (be logical or understandable); To point out (draw attention to; indicate); To keep in mind (remember; consider);

Rosamund Moon's classification is vital because it goes beyond the structure of idioms and focuses on their social context. Through the use of a corpus-based approach (analyzing real-world data), she demonstrates that idioms are not just "slang" but rather instruments for navigating different levels of social hierarchy and professionalism [48].

1.3. Relationship between language and culture

The connection between language and culture is the most crucial and complex issues in contemporary linguistics. Earlier on, linguists would concentrate mostly on language structures. Nowadays, linguists tend to give more importance to people, to their thought processes and to the cultural context within which language occurs [51; 57].

Among the many disciplines concerned with the interconnection of language and culture is linguoculturology. This is the study of the deep interrelation between the cultural identity of a community and its language. Unlike traditional linguistics, which sees language merely as a tool of communication, the new discipline regards language as a carrier of a national culture through which cultural values, traditions, outlook and historical heritage of a nation can be conveyed from one generation to another [51; 57]. Linguoculturology explores language through the culture of the native speakers. Through analysis of words, expressions and symbols used by people in their interactions, one can trace the process of creation of common associations and understanding of life in a certain society [53; 58; 65].

The relation between language and culture becomes obvious when one speaks about culture-specific idioms. Idioms in linguoculturology are defined as fixed phrases containing the historical, social and cultural heritage of a certain group of people [57; 58]. The meaning of idioms is often linked with the following phenomena:

- local traditions and customs;
- folklore and national myths;
- important historical events.

From the point of view of linguoculturological analysis the group of culturally specific idioms are defined as fixed phraseological units that encode the unique historical, social and cultural experiences of a specific community. This explains why it is hard to translate idioms into another language. Word-for-word translation will fail to render their cultural message completely [54; 57; 58]. Idiomatic phrases are viewed

as “cultural codes” by linguoculturologists, because they carry the cultural tradition and perception of life of the nation [51].

At present, a major area of study in linguistics is the connection between language and culture, called cultural linguistics. Gary B. Palmer made a significant contribution to cultural linguistics with his work “Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics” (1996) [52]. Palmer claimed that “language is the play of verbal symbols based in imagery”. Palmer emphasizes that the imagery is not a neutral or objective representation of reality. People do not experience the world in a strictly factual manner. Instead, their experiences are immediately formed and defined by cultural knowledge and social backdrop. In other words, culture shapes how people perceive what they see, hear and feel. These interpretations build mental models and patterns which guide mental processes. According to Palmer, culturally determined imagery effects all levels of language [52; 57]:

- In phonology - sounds are not just physical noises. They are perceived and grouped in ways that depend on cultural and linguistic habits.
- In vocabulary and meaning - words do not have meaning by themselves. Their meanings depend on shared cultural patterns and experiences.
- In grammar - sentence structures reflect how a culture typically organizes events and relationships between people and actions.
- In discourse - communication develops according to shared cultural stories, expectations and ways of understanding situations.
- In worldview - all these elements together create a broader picture of reality that is shaped by culture.

In 2017 Farzad Sharifian broadens this approach in his book on cultural linguistics, by proposing the concept of cultural cognition [58]. He defined culture as a complicated system of shared knowledge spread among members of a community, rather than a fixed set of rules. Cultural understanding comes from interactions between individuals and society. Sharifian identified three main types of cultural conceptualizations [58]:

- **Cultural schemas** are shared patterns of knowledge that drive behavior and expectations in familiar settings, such as social rituals or traditions.
- **Cultural categories** are the ways in which a culture organizes and classifies the world, such as kinship terms, color names and event classification.
- **Cultural metaphors (worldview metaphors)** are profound conceptual patterns that influence how people perceive reality.

Another field of study that is related to the linguoculturology is cognitive linguistics. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's book "Metaphors We Live By" (1980) contributed significantly to the study of cognitive linguistics [38]. They demonstrated that human thought is mainly metaphorical and relies on bodily experience. Metaphors are more than just linguistic decorations. They are crucial tools for thought. This idea, first called "experientialism," later developed into the concept of "embodied interactions" in their book "Philosophy in the Flesh" (1999) [39]. They argued that meaning comes from our bodies and from the way we interact with the physical and cultural world. According to their view, this embodied system affects cognition in several ways. In everyday language, metaphors are everywhere, shaping both speech and thought. In conceptual mapping, abstract ideas often rely on physical experiences and in physical interactions, key cognitive processes like understanding space and time are grounded in our bodily engagement with the world [38; 39].

Building on this framework, Zoltán Kövecses and Peter Szabó challenged the old view of idioms in their study "Idioms: A View from Cognitive Semantics" (1996) [34]. Earlier linguists viewed idioms as random word combinations with unexpected meanings. Kövecses and Szabó demonstrated that idioms are theoretically inspired and related to human experience [35]. They argued that idioms are not isolated statements. They thought that it is a result from a broad understanding of the world. Their approach divides idioms into three categories [35]:

- First, most idioms are conceptual, not just linguistic. They reflect human thought patterns rather than random word combinations.
- Second, cognitive mechanisms like conceptual metaphors, metonymies and shared cultural knowledge connect idioms to abstract meanings.

- Third, systematic mappings link physical source domains, such as a heated fluid in a container, to abstract target domains, like the emotion of anger, explaining expressions like “he blew his top.”

Currently, the most noticeable change in phraseology in the 2020s is the strong influence of digital communication, social media algorithms and the language of Generation Z. These factors have greatly increased the speed at which new words and idioms appear [49]. Many new idioms and slang expressions have found their way into daily talks, professional communication as well as in the media. As a result, traditional ideas about how language develops have changed significantly [18; 50]. In the past idioms took a time to become popular. It would take years or even a very long time for a phrase to be used a lot before people everywhere knew what it meant and it was in the dictionary. Today the situation is very different. Digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and Twitter create a highly connected environment where new expressions can spread very quickly [18]. Recent analyses of digital text corpora also reveal how many expressions that originated online have diffused into general language use. Examples are the verbs to ghost (disappear without a trace or explanation in some communities), to unfriend, to binge-watch, to throw shade (to criticize someone indirectly), low-key (meaning subtle or not obvious) and to Google. Research shows that people use these words for three reasons [18; 50]:

1. They help speakers share a lot of information in a way.
2. These words also show friendship. Being part of a group.
3. In online groups they make talking feel more relaxed and casual even if people don't know each other.

Originally these terms were informal internet slang to describe new online activities. However, as social media spreads language very quickly, these words soon became part of everyday English. And the speed with which these expressions spread shows that digital communication strongly influences how meanings change [50].

Another fascinating development in modern linguistics is the study of so-called “platformed language”. A good example of a modern conceptual phrase used is “main character energy” which invokes the “life is like a cinematic narrative” metaphor in

modern English [43]. With this phrase people portray their lives as if they were in a movie. Scholars such as James Marcia and Dan P. McAdams offer useful insights into this way of thinking [67]. They explain that this demonstrates how people are beginning to see their everyday life situations as a form of storytelling. By tapping into main character energy, people envision themselves as the most important character in the story who drives the plot of their life with their actions and feelings. This concept is vividly visible in digital culture. On social media, users regularly add filters, music and visual aesthetics to normal life activities to make them seem more meaningful or cinematic. Thus the idiom signals broader contemporary values including individuality, personal achievement and creative self-expression [43; 67].

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER 1

The theoretical foundations explored in this chapter have shown that idioms are complex and multifaceted linguistic phenomenon, revealing the intricate relation between language, cognition and culture. Rather than being simple, decorative elements in speech, idioms are key units of communication which capture shared experience, cultural values and conceptual patterns. Following their development from ancient Greek and Roman mythology to the early literary stages of such as Chaucer, Shakespeare and Dickens it becomes clear that idioms develop through the cultural and historical frames of a nation. The study of these areas can contribute to a deeper understanding of both the mechanisms of language change and the awareness of human thought and culture in a figurative sense.

Analysis of the idiom as a linguistic unit allows us to identify its key features:

1. Semantic opacity - the meaning cannot be inferred from the literal meanings of its components.
2. Structural stability - the idiom has a fixed grammatical and lexical form.
3. Pragmatic conventionality - the use of the idiom is based on social convention within a specific culture or speech community.

Idioms are fixed multi-word units with figurative meanings that cannot be derived from the meanings of the individual words contained in them, they act as cohesive lexical items in the lexical and phraseological system of a language. Definitions given by the leading linguists and lexicographers such as David Crystal, Oxford English Dictionary and Longman Dictionary of English Idioms stress on their semantic indivisibility, their syntactic inflexibility and the culture specificity. Additionally, the above mentioned features are yet another evidence that idioms are not the result of random strings of words, but rather they are linguistic units that are firmly established socially influenced by historical factors and the collective usage.

The historical survey which has been developed in this chapter has shown that idioms evolve alongside human civilization. Derived from mythology, religion, literature and life, they contain the intellectual and cultural resources of previous generations. From the classical world and the Middle Ages, to Chaucer, Shakespeare,

Dickens and Carroll, idioms have helped to define cultural identity. The fact that these have survived to become parts of everyday speech demonstrates the fact that they are useful in general and as linguistic means, which store historical information and collective memory of the nation.

In view of the variety and the complexity of idioms, linguists had to establish several classifications in order to remove some difficulties in studying them. Structural and semantic classifications like Adam Makkai's distinction between lexemic and sememic idioms show the extent of idiomaticity in various linguistic strata. W. McMordie's functional and grammatical approaches stresses the syntactic functions which idioms have in sentences. Meanwhile, Chitra Fernando's typology with reference to degrees of idiomaticity (pure, semi-idioms and literal idioms) reveals some aspects of the conflict between literal and figurative sense. Additionally, Rosamund Moon's corpus-based classification illustrates the range of styles in which idioms are used at formal, informal and neutral levels of formality. These classifications together emphasize the complex nature of idioms and their importance in linguistic theory and practice.

Idioms go beyond their structural and functional roles to become important carriers of cultural meaning. Linguoculturology and cultural linguistics stress that they show how language, culture and cognition are all connected. They record shared experiences and shape how people see the world in their own country. Based on the work of Wilhelm von Humboldt and Oleksandr Potebnia, language is seen as a storehouse of a nation's spiritual and intellectual heritage. Culturally specific idioms act as "culture codes" that keep and pass on shared values and traditions. This viewpoint is supported by scholars like Gary B. Palmer and Farzad Sharifian, who emphasize the significance of cultural imagery and cognitive schemas and by George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, Zoltán Kövecses and Peter Szabó, who illustrate the metaphorical and embodied aspects of idiomatic meaning. In the digital age, new phrases like "to ghost", "to binge-watch", "to throw shade" and "main character energy" show how idioms change over time and how they are still important as markers of cultural identity and tools for imaginative use of language.

In conclusion, the study of idioms highlights their fundamental importance in linguistic, cultural and cognitive frameworks. They serve as expressive tools for communication and as repositories of cultural memory, reflections of national identity and frameworks of human cognition.

2. CULTURAL ASPECTS OF IDIOMS IN AMERICAN ENGLISH

2.1. American idioms as reflections of national identity and values

The study of idioms helps us understand the people who use them and where they come from. Idioms are not just words or phrases they are a big part of how people talk, think and percept the world. American English idioms are a part of American life and they help us understand what Americans believe in and value. When we look at American English we see that idioms are more than a way to communicate. They are like a collection of stories about the past of America with all the different groups of people who came to the country, the new land they found the new technology they used and the way they thought about things [61].

To understand why Americans think and behave in their special way we need to look at a key idea in their philosophy which is called American Pragmatism. It is a way of thinking that started in the 1800s and early 1900s and was developed by philosophers like Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey and a lot of others philosophers continued to build on it [23]. The main idea of pragmatism is simple - something is considered “true” if it works in real life. Truth is not seen as something abstract, fixed, or decided by authority. Instead an idea is true if it works well and gives results that we can see [63]. Within this framework pragmatism can be understood as an approach of trying things out and seeing what works. It tells people to try out their ideas see what happens and find solutions to problems in ways. This way of thinking has had an impact on American culture. In particular, it is reflected in the tendency of Americans like to be straightforward, get things done quickly, come up with ideas and achieve practical success [23; 63]. For example, idioms such as “*shoot from the hip*” (to speak in a very direct and honest way), “*walk the walk*” (to act, not just talk), “*get your hands dirty*” (practical involvement) emphasize action and realism. Similarly, idioms like “*give it a shot*” (to attempt something), “*think on your feet*” (quick, practical thinking), “*get down to business*” (to focus on work immediately), “*hit the ground running*” (to start quickly and effectively), “*on the go*” (busy and active) show

us the efficiency and initiative. In addition, idioms reflect the importance of results and practicality, for instance, *“time is money”* (efficiency is valuable), *“the bottom line”* (the final, most important result), *“cut to the chase”* (to focus on what matters). Other idioms like *“back to the drawing board”* (to start again after a failed attempt), *“cut corners”* (to do something in the easiest or fastest way), *“land on your feet”* (to be successful or lucky, especially after a period of not having success or luck), *“hands-on”* (involving direct practical experience), *“get things off the ground”* (to successfully start a project) demonstrate adaptability and efficiency [68; 72; 73; 74; 76; 77].

If pragmatism is the main idea behind how Americans think, then individualism is what gives it energy. One thing that is really important in culture is that people believe very strongly in being free and independent [32; 61]. When researchers who study these topics compare the United States to countries that are rich and developed like the countries in Europe or Asia they see that Americans are different because they care more about being free than about the government making sure everyone is equal. This difference is mainly about how people understand freedom [32]. In the United States freedom usually means that the government does not bother you and this is what people call “negative liberty”. In other countries freedom means that the government should help people by giving them different things such as healthcare, a place to live and money to help them. This is what people call “positive liberty” [32]. Americans think about freedom and individualism a lot and it is a big part of who they are. Individualism is what makes Americans think that they should be able to make their choices and have the freedom to do what they want. To provide evidence for the concept of being free and independent we can look at several American English idioms such as *“footloose and fancy-free”* (to be able to go anywhere and do anything that one wants; carefree) and *“be in the driver's seat”* (to be in charge or in control of a situation) emphasize personal freedom and independence. Similarly, *“take the bull by the horns”* (to do something difficult in a brave and determined way), *“go out on a limb”* (to take a risk), *“stand/walk tall”* (to act in a proud and confident way), *“go against the grain”* (to do something contrary to natural inclination, standard behavior, or prevailing trends) highlight courage. In addition, many idioms reflect self-reliance,

for example, *“paddle your own canoe”* (to be independent and do not need help from anyone else.), *“pull/haul yourself up by the/your (own) bootstraps”* (to improve your situation without any help from other people), *“have/got it made”* (to have no problems; to have achieved success), *“think outside the box”* (to think imaginatively using new ideas instead of traditional or expected ideas), *“blaze a trail”* (to do something that has never been done before), *“call the shots”* (to be in charge, hold the authority and make the important decisions in a situation), *“fair and square”* (in an honest way and without any doubt), *“stand on your own (two) feet”* (be or become self-reliant or independent), which further demonstrate how individualism is connected with innovation, leadership and personal achievement in American culture [68; 72; 73; 74; 76; 77; 78].

One of the most influential ideas in the United States that we should explore more is the American Dream [15; 37]. It shapes social values, beliefs in hard work, everyday behaviour and individual success. The American Dream is something that people have believed in for a time. It started with the Puritans, who were some of the people to settle in the United States [15; 37]. They believed in the Protestant work ethic, which taught that hard work pleased God and that material success was a sign of moral goodness and spiritual favor. Over time, the American Dream has changed and it is not about pleasing God anymore. Now it is about being successful because of someone's efforts. People are responsible for their own success and should not expect government to ensure it for them [36]. In the logic of this system, ideas about merit - that people should be rewarded for their natural talents and their hard work - help to explain why some people are rich and others are poor. It produces “survival of the fittest” ideology in which competition and inequality are considered natural and needed for economy to work [15; 24; 37; 65]. To demonstrate the validity of this idea there are vivid examples of idioms such as *“sweat blood”* (extreme effort), *“keep (one’s) nose to the grindstone”* (to work hard, persistent effort), *“burn the midnight oil”* (to work late into the night), *“knuckle down”* (to focus and work hard) that emphasize hard work and dedication which are central to the American Dream. Similarly, idioms such as *“strike it rich”* (to become wealthy or successful), *“hit the jackpot”* (to achieve major

success), *“big shot/cheese”* (an important, powerful or influential person) reflect the goal of achieving success and recognition. In addition, some idioms highlight determination, for instance, *“stick to (one’s) guns”* (to maintain your principles), *“take the bull by the horns”* (to face challenges directly), *“make (something) from scratch”* (create success starting from nothing), *“dark horse”* (unexpected success), *“diamond in the rough”* (someone with potential who can succeed), *“wait for (one’s) ship to come in”* (to wait for the opportunity to succeed), *“stand out in a/the crowd”* (to distinguish oneself through achievement), *“roll with the punches”* (to adapt to obstacles while pursuing success), further illustrate how American Dream is connected to opportunity, effort and individual achievement [68; 72; 73; 74; 76; 78].

The food habits of the United States tell us a lot about its culture and history. The United States consists of many different cultures. Once described as a “melting pot,” it is now more accurately referred to as a “salad bowl” with cohesive cultures that still retain their distinctiveness [26]. Traditions in eating are a key way to understand the culture of the US. The well-known phrase, “you are what you eat,” inspired by quotations from Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, suggests that people’s food choices reveal who they are in terms of values, history and social identity [5]. The American food culture has been influenced from many sides, including early colonial cooking and the contributions of enslaved African American cooks, to fast food and new food cultures [11]. These food traditions reflect the country’s history, including multiculturalism, migrations, cultural adaptation and cross-cultural borrowing. In addition, food habits in America have long mirrored social class, cultural identity and societal values. American “zigzag” fork etiquette - based around the idea that utensils were a scarcity rather than an abundance as they are today - practices such as these historically indicated wealth and refinement, while post-Civil War manuals of etiquette for an emerging middle class demonstrated culture through dress, table manners and dining conduct [40]. Institutions like the National School Lunch Program continue to shape ideas of what it means to eat “American,” with cafeterias highlighting social and economic differences and sometimes pressuring minority children to choose between assimilation and cultural identity [40]. Fast food - and the hamburger in particular -

represents American ideals of speed, efficiency and convenience, it has been made more respectable by the standardization of recipes, marketing and the creation of national franchises, such as McDonald's. But the health impacts of fast food and its disruption to traditional diets have led to a revival of interest in slow-cooked regional foods, like barbecue, that require skill, heritage and intentionality - illustrating how American foodways are an ongoing connection between tradition, innovation, social meaning and cultural adaptation [5; 11; 26; 40]. To reinforce the idea that food reflects culture, values, social identity and everyday life in the United States focus on such idioms as "*top banana*" (the most powerful, important, or dominant person in a group, organization, or project), "*smart cookie*" (a clever person who makes good decisions), "*tough cookie*" (a person who is able to deal with difficult situations and not be easily defeated, frightened, or upset), "*couch potato*" (a person who watches a lot of television and does not have an active life), "*be (as) nutty as a fruitcake*" (to be a very strange or crazy person), which describe people and their character. Other idioms such as "*go/sell like hotcakes*" (to be bought quickly and in large numbers), "*eat crow*" (to admit that you were wrong), "*have egg on your face*" (to look stupid because of something that you have done), "*pie in the sky*" (something that you hope will happen but is very unlikely to happen) talk about success, failure and mistakes [68; 72; 73; 74; 76]. In addition, some idioms relate to money and ease of action, for example, "*gravy train*" (a way of making money quickly, easily and often dishonestly) and "*be like taking candy from a baby*" (to be very easy). There are also idioms that describe thinking and awareness like "*wake up & smell coffee*" (to tell someone that they are wrong about a particular situation and must realize what is really happening). Finally, food idioms can describe time, completeness and difficult situations, for instance, "*in a New York minute*" (very quickly, instantly, or in a remarkably short period of time), "*the whole enchilada*" (everything that could possibly be included), "*in the weeds*" (with so many problems or so much work that you are finding it difficult to deal with something) [68; 72; 73; 74; 76; 78].

In the US, holidays play a very important role in uniting people, promoting traditions and sometimes even affecting shopping patterns. Public holidays in the

United States have become more popular over time, especially after events such as the American Civil War [49]. Thanksgiving is one of the most unique American holidays. It is about a family meal and they always have turkey as the main food. This holiday started a time ago in 1621 in Plymouth [14]. People who settled in America and Native Americans shared food together after a hard time. After some time, Abraham Lincoln made it a national holiday in 1863. Thanksgiving is a time when family comes together. They are thankful for what they have and also eat a lot of food [14]. For example, idioms like *“stuffed like a turkey”* (feeling extremely full from eating a lot of food) and *“eat like a horse”* (to eat a lot of food) both describe eating a very large amount of food, which reflects the idea of the Thanksgiving day. Similarly, idioms such as *“count your blessings”* (to be grateful for the good things in your life), *“a blessing in disguise”* (something that seems bad or unlucky at first, but results in something good happening later), *“turn over a new leaf”* (to start behaving in a better way), *“feast your eyes on something/someone”* (to look at someone or something with great enjoyment), *“run in the family”* (a trait or habit common emphasizes gratitude, personal reflection and importance of family ties [68; 72; 73]. In addition, some idioms link to this holiday reflect change and personal responsibility, for instance, *“cold turkey”* (the abrupt and complete stop of a habit), among relatives), *“talk turkey”* (to discuss something honestly and directly), *“bring something to the table”* (to provide something that will be a benefit), *“stew (in your own juices)”* (to think about or suffer the results of your own actions, without anyone giving you any help) [68; 72; 73; 74; 78].

Another popular holiday in the United States is Halloween which is celebrated on the 31st of October [56]. This holiday originally came from this Celtic festival called Samhain, which marked the end of summer and the start of winter. People then really believed that on Halloween night the line between the living and the dead was not as strong as it usually was. So to keep themselves safe they would light fires and wear weird costumes to try and scare away any bad spirits that might be around. These old customs were brought over to America by people who moved here those, from Ireland and over time they changed into the Halloween customs that we have today. Halloween is still a part of American culture and people love to celebrate it every year on October

31st [56]. For example, idioms such as “*ghost town*” (a town where few or no people now live), “*not have a/the ghost of a chance*” (to have no chance at all), reflect emptiness and supernatural, which are central themes of Halloween. Other idioms like “*raise someone from the dead*” (to make a dead person start living again), “*give up the ghost*” (to die), “*make someone's blood run cold*” (to terrify someone) and “*whistle past the graveyard*” (to ignore something frightening) are directly connected with ideas of supernatural beliefs and the atmosphere of horror associated with Halloween [71; 72; 73; 76]. Additionally, there are idioms that relate to hidden fears and secrets, for example, “*skeleton in the/your closet*” (an embarrassing secret), “*make no bones about something*” (not to try to hide your feelings), “*feel something in your bones*” (to believe something very strongly), “*not have a snowball's chance in hell*” (to be completely unable to achieve something). Also, some idioms emphasize danger and violence, which are often associated with Halloween themes, for instance, “*in cold blood*” (to kill in a way that seems especially cruel because it seems to show no emotion), “*blood and guts*” (extreme violence), “*put/stick the knife into someone*” (to be unpleasant about someone, or try to harm someone) [71; 72; 73; 76].

One more important holiday in the US is Christmas [59]. Christmas in America is really different now than it used to be. In the distant past it was a religious holiday. Today, Christmas is a holiday that is focused more or less entirely on the family - parents and children celebrating together in the comfort of the home. After World War II, Americans feared the Cold War and all the terrors of the world [41; 59]. They just loved the warm and cozy aspects of Christmas - decorating the tree, hanging stockings and exchanging nice gifts. It made them feel safe and happy at home. Gift-giving became such a big, costly deal over the years. Americans now spend nearly \$1 trillion on Christmas shopping and presents every year [41]. Because there are so many gifts everyone is supposed to buy, it can be a bit overwhelming. To add some levity and less seriousness to it all, Americans invented the party game “white elephant” gift exchange. It is a game in which people bring humorous, odd, inexpensive or downright useless gifts like a weird gadget, an ugly sweater, or a silly thing. At office parties or family gatherings everyone takes turns picking a gift or stealing someone's gift. It

usually turns into a funny, chaotic game where people laugh a lot which makes Christmas more enjoyable [59; 60]. For example, idioms such as “*the more the merrier*” (an occasion will be more enjoyable if a lot of people are there), “*it's the thought that counts*” (good or kind intentions are the most important thing, even if what you do or give someone is not perfect) highlight the social and familial focus of Christmas. Furthermore, idioms like “*be like a kid in a candy store*” (to be very happy and excited about the things around you), “*lit up like a Christmas tree*” (to suddenly appear very happy, excited, or animated), “*with bells on*” (enthusiastically), “*in high spirits*” (to be extremely happy), “*tis the season*” (it is the holiday season) show the joy and festive energy which is often associated with this holiday. Correspondingly, there are idioms that illustrate the preparation of the celebration such as “*deck the halls*” (to decorate), “*a gift that keeps on giving*” (something that continues to have a payoff), “*put the finishing touches on*” (to add the final improvements to something) [68; 72; 73; 74].

2.2. Historical references in American English idioms

It has been said that for the United States, American English emerged rapidly in a period of upheaval and transformation [42]. That was colonization followed by a massive expansion westward, an industrial buildup and then wars. Unlike Europe, where people lived isolated and developed different dialects for hundreds of years, early American colonists were much more mobile [42]. The first American idioms were pitched to the day-to-day challenges of primitive life in the first settlements. Life was centered around farming, sea trade and dealings with the Indians. Furthermore, in regions like New England, small, isolated communities developed different idioms derived from daily activity, survival and deeply religious convictions [27]. Idioms such as “*a hard/tough row to hoe*” (a difficult situation to deal with), “*hit the hay*” (to go to bed in order to sleep), “*(as) easy as falling off a log*” (extremely easy), “*hold your horses*” (to stop or wait), “*be barking up the wrong tree*” (to mistake one's object, or to pursue the wrong course to obtain it), “*go haywire*” (to stop working correctly)

illustrate the agrarian origins and influence of the natural environment of early American English [72; 73; 77; 78]. Similarly, idioms like *“have an ax to grind”* (to have a selfish reason or strong opinion that influences your actions), *“smoke the peace pipe”* (to settle a dispute, end an argument), *“keep your ear to the ground”* (to pay attention to everything that is happening around you), *“play possum”* (to pretend to be dead or sleeping so that someone will not annoy or attack you), *“learn/know the ropes”* (to learn/know how to do a job or activity), *“cover your tracks”* (to hide or destroy the things that show where you have been or what you have been doing), *“mend fences”* (to try to be friendly again with someone after an argument) demonstrate that many of them come from particular social or professional environments - like hunting, war, craft, or community rituals [72; 73; 74; 75; 76]. Over time the meaning of these phrases changed and people started using them in their daily conversations.

Idioms also emerged during the American Revolution and the wars [25]. The American Revolution (1775-1783) was a tough time for people. There were a lot of economic problems. One popular example is *“not worth a Continental”*. It emerged when paper currency known as “Continental” was rendered worthless due to inflation and counterfeiting [25]. So, when people said something was *“not worth a Continental”* they meant it was totally worthless. Additionally, a related wartime hardship idiom appeared such as *“keep the home fires burning”* meaning to keep hope and stability going through hard times. Idiomatic phrases like *“don't fire till you see the whites of their eyes”* (to hold your fire or delay action until the enemy is extremely close), *“don't tread on me”* (signals a warning against oppression and a demand for individual liberty), *“we must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately”* (the group must remain united and support each other) show us the resistance to oppression and unity [68; 73; 74; 77].

Unfortunately, wars act like fast language factories. When millions of ordinary people are suddenly brought together in hard war conditions and confronted with new threats and weapons, they quickly come up with new words, nicknames and expressions. Some of them then enter everyday American English and stay there forever. For example, idiom *“brother against brother”* came to describe extreme

internal conflict, specifically when family members, citizens, or close allies fight on opposite sides of a war [3; 19]. Another example is *“loose lips sink ships”* meaning a careless talk or sharing secrets can cause disastrous consequences. Other idioms reflect problem-solving and decision-making under pressure, for example *“back to the drawing board”* which means back to the beginning of a process to start it again, because it is not working, while *“D-day”* (a day when something important will happen) has come to mean any crucial or decisive moment. In situations of danger, someone vulnerable may be called *“a sitting duck”* and hasty reactions without thinking about them are described as *“hit/press/push the panic button”* which also reflects the behavior during the war. In addition, war has also shaped idioms that express totality or dramatic actions, for instance *“the whole nine yards”* means that everything possible or “the full extend”, while *“drop the bomb”* refers to suddenly reveal shocking, unexpected, or dramatic news. More abstract idioms such as *“mutually assured destruction”* (the situation in which two very powerful countries have enough nuclear weapons to destroy each other) reflect the reality of modern warfare, especially nuclear tension, whereas idioms like *“behind the curtain”* suggest secrecy and hidden actions. Finally, *“draw a line in the sand”* (to set a strict limit or boundary beyond which one will not proceed), illustrates the human need to set form limits even in conflict situations [3; 19; 68; 72; 73; 77; 78].

Another part of American history that is important to cover is Gold Rush. Gold mining was really tough and competitive [18]. When a gold miner found a spot to look for gold the first thing they did was *“stake a claim”*. This meant they put sticks in the ground to mark the area as their gold mining spot. It showed gold miners that this land already belonged to a gold miner. Nowadays the idiom *“stake a claim”* is used in lots of situations. It means to say that something belongs to you or that you have an interest in something. Gold miners also came up with two English idioms such as *“to pan out”* and *“to hit pay dirt”*. In placer gold mining gold miners used a metal pan to collect water and sand from rivers. They moved the pan carefully so that the heavy gold stayed at the bottom while the lighter sand washed away. If they found gold their gold mining work panned out meaning it was successful [19]. Nowadays we use this phrase to talk

about any plan or idea that succeeds or fails, like gold mining. The second idiom is “*to hit pay dirt*”. There was the layer of soil that contained gold under the ground. When gold miners reached it they could earn money quickly from gold mining. So, to hit pay dirt now means to find something important after searching for a long time like searching for gold.

2.3. Idioms describing American politics

Politics is not only about making laws and decisions. Language matters extremely. Politicians use words to shape ideas and influence people so they can get support [3]. In politics idioms are really helpful because they make complicated ideas easy to understand. American politics use idioms to help politicians talk to voters. Sometimes they use idioms to say something bad, about the people running against them. Idioms in politics are often metaphors [28]. These metaphors tie abstract ideas of politics to aspects of everyday life. For instance, politics is regularly described as a war, with politicians “fighting”, “defeating” or “attacking” their political opponents [3]. That can encourage people to act and make people think they have to win or lose. It is harder to find a ground when people think this way. Idioms such as “*bring/call something/someone to heel*” (to force someone to obey you) “*wage a campaign*” (if a person, group, or country wages a campaign or a war, they start it and continue it over a period of time), “*smear campaign*” (a planned attempt to harm the reputation of a person or company by telling lies about them), “*fight fire with fire*” (to use the same methods as someone else in order to defeat them), “*witch hunt*” (an attempt to find and punish people whose opinions are unpopular and who are said to be a danger to society) “*snowflake*” (is used by right-wing people to insult liberal or progressive people) show how deeply conflict-based metaphors shape political thinking and language in the United States. Furthermore, this type of language creates a sense of conflict between groups [68; 71; 73; 77].

At the same time, there are such positive metaphors. Politics is also construction and maintenance, as suggested by phrases such as “*rebuild the nation*” (collectively

restore and improve the country together), “*repair the system*” (to fix current institutional flaws through maintenance) and “*lay new foundations*” (to establish stable, new and inclusive social and political standards for the future). Such idioms make government activity sound as if it consists of shaping something concrete and beneficial to all. It leaves the impression that politicians are forceful leaders who know how to get things done and it makes complicated policies seem practical and reliable [68; 71; 73; 77].

Another popular means of defining politics in the English language used in America involves idioms that deal with motion and travel [3; 28]. For instance, “*to take someone for a ride*” suggests the act of deceiving or duping someone, “*on the cusp of a new golden age*” indicates that one is near a time of prosperity. Finally, the idiom “*derailment*” signifies an act of derailing a plan or legislation. These idioms illustrate how political processes can be understood as a motion towards a particular end. Candidates may depict themselves as guides for the journey of the country. These idioms allow people to conceptualize end goals in the distant future by likening politics to a familiar event - taking a trip [3; 28; 71; 73; 77].

Politics being described as a sport is frequently used as a metaphor in political domain. Under this logic, politicians are treated as athlete or players who come up with plans to win. They try to beat their opponents and keep their seats by getting people to vote for them. Among them “*playing the card*” (the strategic use of demographic or identity-based issues for political leverage), “*pulling their punches*” (political debates as boxing matches, used to critique candidates who hold back), “*strike/strike out*” (to describe a severe political failure or missed legislative opportunity) and “*two-horse race*” (narrowly contested, highly competitive election between just two primary candidates). This analogy makes politics seem more accessible and engaging to average people. It simplifies complex politics into a common competitive story much like football or horse racing, with a focus on performance, strategy and which competitor is currently winning. This makes politics easier to understand [3; 28; 71; 73; 77].

There are also many traditional idioms that describe how American politics works. For example, idiom “*pork-barrel spending*” means allocating a large portion of government money in a specific place to try to win the support or vote of local people towards a politician or party, regardless of whether the project really does anything to benefit the nation. “*Logrolling*” refers to the informal practice of trading votes among politicians, to support one another’s legislation in ways that benefit both sides. Another example is “*gerrymander*” means that people in power in American politics change the boundaries of voting areas on purpose. They do this to get voters who will likely support a particular party or candidate in American politics. Furthermore, “*filibuster*” refers to the practice of making speeches to delay or stop a new law from being passed in American politics. During election campaigns politicians and the media use additional idioms. A top candidate is called a “*front-runner*” meaning that they are most likely to win, while a politician who is leaving office is a “*lame duck*”. Another prominent example is a “*swing state*”. It refers to a state where either party has a chance to win. This makes it very important, during elections. Candidates also depend on a “*stump speech*” which is a prepared and rehearsed standard speech delivered at various places in order to get political support [3; 28; 71; 73; 77].

In recent years, especially between 2016 and 2026, new idioms have appeared in American political language [17]. These new idioms usually come from media and show what is happening in politics today. For example, the idiom “*drain the swamp*” means that people want to get rid of corruption in the government. Next example is “*deep state*” and this idiom is used to talk about the idea that there are hidden forces that control the decisions that are made in politics. Additionally, there are recent idiom such as “*AI slop*” which is used to describe low-quality content that is generated by artificial intelligence and “*sanewashing*” which means minimizing the perceived radical aspects of a person or idea in order to make them appear more acceptable to a wider audience [17; 71; 73; 77].

Moreover, it is also worth mentioning that although there are idioms in the language of politics, slogans still retain a dominant position.

2.4. Sports and entertainment-related idioms in American English

The English language is heavily influenced by its speakers' culture, history and ways of thinking. Sports are a highly prominent cultural area in American English. Sports are more than just entertainment and intimately linked to the language itself. Sports idioms serve much more purposes in modern American English than just being stylistic devices or informal language. These are basic cognitive processes that enable speakers to use clear, generally recognized imagery to convey the intricate, frequently chaotic details of business negotiations, political campaigns, court cases and interpersonal relationships [16; 36].

Baseball is the sport that has made the biggest, most constant and most profound contribution to the everyday idiom of American English [16; 36]. Because of its lengthy history and cultural significance, it is frequently referred to as “America's pastime” [36]. Baseball is a slow, structured sport that relies on distinct individual actions. In a particular moment, a player either succeeds or fails. Because of this, baseball serves as an ideal model for explaining circumstances in both business and life where performance is likewise evaluated through observable outcomes.

Many baseball idioms are associated with concepts such as being prepared, ready and accept personal responsibility while working as a team [8; 16; 36]. The batter's box, where a player stands to hit the ball, serves as a powerful metaphor for responsibility as a professional. The idiom “*step up to the plate*” refers to the actual act of a batter entering a box to confront a fast pitch. It is now commonly used in everyday American English to indicate that you are prepared to handle a serious situation, take on a challenging task, or accept a challenge. A player must wait in the on-deck circle before they can step up to the plate. As a result, the idiom “*on deck*” refers to being the next person to act, assume a role, or speak - for instance, during a meeting. Someone may be asked “*to pinch-hit*” if they have to handle an urgent issue at work while the primary person in charge is unavailable. A pinch-hitter is a baseball substitute who enters the game at a crucial and frequently tense point. “*Go to bat for (someone)*” is an idiom that conveys a similar idea of helping and supporting others.

This phrase originally meant taking someone else's place as a batter, but it has since evolved to mean defending or supporting another person - for example, speaking up for a colleague, assisting an employee during a performance review, or standing by a friend during a dispute [16; 36; 68; 71; 73; 77; 78].

American English baseball idioms frequently describe success and failure in a very clear way, much like what happens when a batter tries to hit the ball [16; 36; 68]. A player either succeeds or fails and this concept is used to discuss people's performance in daily life or at work. For instance, "*bat a thousand*" means doing something perfectly every time. It originates from the notion that a player should get a hit on each and every try, which is statistically ideal in baseball. An attempt is referred to as "*a swing and a miss*" if it clearly fails. Someone "*couldn't get to first base*" when discussing the very beginning of an endeavor, which means they did not even get off to a successful start in a project, business or relationship. Nevertheless, there is no guarantee of total collapse, considering the unexpected turn that events can take. In this instance, the idiom "*a whole new ballgame*" is employed to refer to an entirely new set of conditions compared to what was anticipated or experienced before. When someone chooses to "*swing for the fences*" and take a significant risk in order to achieve great success, it means attempting to win in a daring manner. Idioms additionally help in describing unexpected circumstances and communication. For example, when something unexpected occurs, it is referred to as "*throwing a curve ball*". In real life, a curveball refers to an unforeseen issue or difficulty because it is hard to predict in baseball. "*On the ball*" means reacting quickly and understanding what happens. However, when someone fails to complete a simple task there is idiom such as "*drop the ball*" [16; 36; 68; 73; 76; 78].

American football and basketball gained dominance over baseball in American culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries due to their prevalence on television [8; 16; 34]. The two games represent a nation that requires swift reactions and cooperation, thus football and basketball phrases have a greater emphasis on teamwork, speed, pressure and strategy compared to personal initiative. Firstly, the aim of football is to gain ground through teamwork. In this regard, "*touchdown*" is often used to refer

to significant success in any undertaking since it is the leading way of scoring in the sport. Secondly, American football offers some phrases associated with strategy and desperation [60]. A “*Hail Mary*” or “*Hail Mary pass*” refers to the final and most desperate attempt for a win despite the poor chances of success. It happens after a long throw of the ball towards the end of the game, usually out of desperation. Thirdly, “*move the goalposts*” is another popular idiom that implies unfairly changing the rules or conditions when conducting a project. It is based on the concept of literally moving the goalposts at the moment when someone is about to achieve a goal or get the ball between them, thereby making it a lot harder to score.

Basketball idioms reflect the game's speed, energy and close-contact nature [8; 34]. “*Slam dunk*” is one of the most frequently used idioms. This is a strong and nearly guaranteed method of scoring in basketball. In everyday language, it refers to something that is certain to succeed, such as a powerful argument or clear evidence. Another example of basketball idiom is “*full-court press*” when a person or group applies intense and consistent pressure from the start. In basketball, players use this defensive tactic to put pressure on their rivals all over the court. In everyday language, it refers to an intense and ongoing effort to control a situation or achieve a goal.

Based on the ideas of Buhmann, Hellmueller and Bosshart, entertainment is an important aspect of culture since it serves as a means of communication in which individuals share their beliefs, concepts, values and social experiences [10]. Popular culture produces subjects of discussion among people and influences their views. Forms of entertainment like movies, music, television and others convey messages from culture to its members. Entertainment industry in America covers several sectors such as theater, notably Broadway, the film world of Hollywood, music and even modern digital platforms developed in Silicon Valley. As a whole, these sectors play an extremely important role in the way people communicate [53; 66].

In particular, Broadway in New York has been an extremely significant element in the development of American English idioms. Theatrical performance is a realm of strong emotion, rigid discipline and constant public attention, thus it is quite natural that idiomatic expressions would develop there [23; 53; 61]. Good examples are idioms

such as “*take centre stage*” meaning to assume an important role, whereas “*in the spotlight*” indicates that one is being critically observed or judged. By contrast, “*steal the limelight*” and “*upstage someone*” refer to situations when one tries to deprive another person of attention, with “*upstage*” deriving from the structure of older theatres, where walking backwards on stage took the observer’s gaze away from the rest of the performance. The distinction between visible and invisible aspects of theatrical life is reflected in the expression “*behind the scenes*” which is today understood to mean something unseen or concealed. Live theatre creates strong pressure because there are no retakes, which has led to idioms about performance and behavior. For example, “*break a leg*” is used to wish good luck in an indirect way. The idiom “*song and dance*” refers to an exaggerated or untrue explanation, while “*clown around*” describes silly or unserious behavior [68; 72; 73; 74; 77; 78].

Another important field in America culture is filmmaking and television. A number of idioms relate to technical procedures and audience perception and have been incorporated into daily language use [53]. Based on a selective sampling from the lexicographical sources cited in the references, we have analyzed a series of idioms that characterize sports and entertainment-related idioms in American English. Specifically, the idiom “cut to the chase” is a film editing process that requires going straight to the heart of an issue without any extra explanations. The concept of suspense in narratives can be seen in the idiom “*cliffhanger*”, which is used to refer to a very dramatic and unsolved ending. Idioms describing certain social trends include “*climb on the bandwagon*” indicating an action based solely on social popularity. Television-related idioms include terms such as “*idiot box*” a pejorative expression for television. Moreover, idioms related to time and urgency have been provided by broadcasting media. For instance, “*down to the wire*” and “*under the wire*” both refer to instances wherein decisions or tasks are made right at the last minute [53; 68; 72; 73; 74; 77; 78].

Music has been also significant in shaping American culture and had immense effects on daily conversation [76]. Many idioms have been derived from music and refer to behaviors, conduct and ways of communication [68; 72]. For instance, when talking about additional or similar things, one can say “*all that jazz*” while when

somebody starts working well or gaining confidence, they “*get in the groove*”. The idiom “*jam session*” which referred to an informal musical performance before, is currently applied to all spontaneous activities. Idioms related to music can also be found in describing responsibility and personal conduct. If a person needs to be responsible for the consequences of their actions, then there is an idiom such as “*face the music*”. If there are minor changes or adjustments that need to be made to get things done perfectly, then the idiom used is “*fine-tune*”. A person who takes their own path rather than follow other people’s footsteps can use the idiom “*march to (the beat of) (one’s) own drum*” [68; 72; 73; 74; 77; 78].

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER 2

Through the examination of idiomatic expressions in American English, the second chapter of this research paper has discussed the fact that idiomatic expressions can be regarded as a reflection of the identity, history and lifestyle of America. Through examining idioms under various categories, one would find that idioms are not just mere expressions of words.

To begin with, the study reveals that the American core values, such as pragmatism, individualism and the “American Dream”, have found their way into the language through idioms associated with the concepts of hard work, independence and practicality. Also, food and popular holidays, such as Thanksgiving, Halloween and Christmas, are among the cultural features whose vocabulary includes phrases describing the personality traits and behavior of people as well as family ties.

Another aspect that has significantly influenced the American lexicon is the country’s development throughout the past centuries. From the period when people had to survive among nature in farming activities to the time of the Gold Rush and different wars, history played the crucial role for the Americans. The idioms people use in their everyday work at offices and homes originated from the experiences of war fighters or miners searching for gold.

Thirdly, political life in America relies on idioms to simplify complicated notions in order to make them easier for the public to comprehend. The use of such idioms enables politicians to construct perceptions of reality by making references to war, games and journeys. This may be done in both traditional and modern forms of expression that come from the digital age.

Lastly, sports and entertainment are integral parts of modern-day communication. Idioms relating to responsibility, cooperation and strategy can be found in various kinds of games such as baseball, football and basketball. In the same way, there are expressions derived from theatrical performances, movies and songs which use the metaphors of performance in describing public life and personal conduct.

In conclusion, idiomatic language is an essential component of American culture. It links the past to the present and transforms abstract ideas into concrete expressions. To truly understand America's unique culture and history, one must grasp the meaning of such idioms.

CONCLUSION

The present bachelor's thesis examines culturally specific idioms in American English as linguistic units reflecting cultural meanings. The study is based on idioms selected from the dictionaries listed in the lexicographic sources. The combination of theoretical approaches and the analysis of these idioms has shown how idiomatic expressions encode cultural information and reflect the interrelation between language and culture.

The theoretical background of idiomaticity was set out in the first chapter. Idioms have been described as fixed multi-word forms whose meanings cannot be comprehended literally since they bear metaphorical meaning. The classification of idioms according to various scholars, including Makkai, McMordie, Fernando and Moon, revealed their presence in any level of language usage, from slang to professional contexts. By making use of the theories of cultural linguistics and cognitive semantics, the idiomaticity of phrases used in different languages is proved to be based on humans' experiences and "cultural schemas". Moreover, it has been discussed that idioms can emerge due to changes in language as well.

In the second chapter, the cultural and historical context of the United States was analyzed, and it was demonstrated that American English idioms constitute a significant manifestation of national identity, values, and historical development. Idioms were found to be more than language units employed for communicative purposes. They are significant aspects of culture that keep the traditions, beliefs and mentality of the Americans. Idiomatic expressions can reveal the views that Americans hold towards success, freedom, work and other aspects of their lives. The research showed that that American idioms are very much related to the main values upon which the country was developed. Pragmatism, efficiency, individualism and personal responsibility were proved to play an essential role in creating American idioms. In addition, this chapter indicated that American Dream represents a vital concept of American culture that contributes to the formation of American idioms. Another observation made in the chapter was that idioms in American English convey

significant experiences from the history of America and represent various stages of its growth. They emerged as a result of colonizing America, living on a farm, fighting for freedom during the American Revolution, engaging in battles and mining gold during the Gold Rush period. All these events affected the formation of idiomatic expressions in American English associated with survival, fights, independence and adaptation. Furthermore, it was found that politics, sports and entertainment exert a great deal of impact upon the idiomatic system of American English. Idioms from the sphere of politics simplify complicated political concepts with the help of metaphors and rhetoric, whereas idioms connected with sports express the competitive spirit of sports, cooperation and victory. Idioms used in connection with entertainment indicate the impact of drama, cinema, TV and music upon daily speech.

The results of this research support the idea that idioms play an important role in conveying cultural information by maintaining the collective memory of the nation. The study of idioms can be highly significant for linguistics and intercultural communication due to the fact that idioms provide insight into cultural information embedded in the language itself.

In conclusion, the idiomatic system of the Americans demonstrates a culture that is dynamic in terms of action, self-reliance, creativity and individual success. Through idioms, the Americans preserve their unique culture while at the same time developing as a result of the evolution of the society in America. Idiomatic expressions will continue coming up with changes in the American society, thus proving the importance of this area of linguistics.

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APPENDIX

1. “(as) blind as a bat” - unable to see well;
2. “(as) dead as a doornail” - completely dead;
3. “(as) easy as falling off a log” - extremely easy;
4. “a (whole) new ballgame” - a situation that is completely different from what one is used to or expecting;
5. “a blessing in disguise” - something that seems bad or unlucky at first, but results in something good happening later;
6. “a gift that keeps on giving” - something that continues to have a payoff;
7. “a hard/tough row to hoe” - a difficult situation to deal with;
8. “a sitting duck” - someone or something that is very easy for an enemy to shoot or attack;
9. “a swing and a miss” - an attempt to do something that ultimately fails;
10. “AI slop” - low-quality, mass-produced digital content generated by artificial intelligence;
11. “all that jazz” - and everything else; and many related things;
12. “back to the drawing board” - revising something (such as a plan) from the beginning, typically after it has failed;
13. “bat a thousand” - by extension, to be successful in an endeavor or in multiple areas of one's life;
14. “be (as) nutty as a fruitcake” - to be a very strange or crazy person;
15. “be barking up the wrong tree” - to mistake one's object, or to pursue the wrong course to obtain it;
16. “be in the driver's seat” - to be in charge or in control of a situation.
17. “be like a kid in a candy store” - to be very happy and excited about the things around you;
18. “be like taking candy from a baby” - to be very easy;
19. “behind the curtain” - in secret; concealed from public view or knowledge;

20. “*behind the scenes*” - without being widely known or attracting attention;
21. “*big shot/cheese*” - an important, powerful or influential person;
22. “*bite the bullet*” - to force yourself to do something unpleasant or difficult;
23. “*blaze a trail*” - to do something that has never been done before;
24. “*blood-and-guts*” - depicting or marked by great violence or zeal;
25. “*break a leg*” - good luck!;
26. “*bring something to the table*” - to provide something that will be a benefit;
27. “*bring/call something/someone to heel*” (to force someone to obey you)
28. “*brother against brother*” - extreme internal conflict, most famously used to describe families divided during the American Civil War;
29. “*burn the midnight oil*” - to work late into the night;
30. “*call the shots*” - to be in charge, hold the authority and make the important decisions in a situation;
31. “*cliffhanger*” - a contest whose outcome is in doubt up to the very end;
32. “*climb on the bandwagon*” - to join others in supporting a cause or a political party, or to follow a trend;
33. “*clown around*” - act as or like a clown
34. “*cold turkey*” - the abrupt and complete stop of a habit;
35. “*couch potato*” - a person who spends much time sitting or lying down, usually watching television;
36. “*couldn't get to first base*” - to successfully move through the initial phase of something;
37. “*count your blessings*” - to be grateful for the good things in your life;
38. “*cover your tracks*” - to hide or destroy the things that show where you have been or what you have been doing;
39. “*cut corners*” - to do something in the easiest or fastest way;
40. “*cut to the chase*” - to focus on what matters;
41. “*dark horse*” - unexpected success;
42. “*D-day*” - a day when something important will happen;

43. “*deck the halls*” - to decorate;
44. “*deep state*” - a network of people alleged by conspiracy theorists who secretly rule a democratically elected government by functioning out of public view in its various agencies;
45. “*derailment*” - fiasco of a legislative plan;
46. “*diamond in the rough*” - someone with potential who can succeed;
47. “*don’t tread on me*” - signals a warning against oppression and a demand for individual liberty;
48. “*don’t fire till you see the whites of their eyes*” - to hold your fire or delay action until the enemy is extremely close;
49. “*down to the wire*” - until the last possible second;
50. “*drain the swamp*” - to root out or eradicate political corruption within a government, as by undoing corrupt policies or forcing out corrupt officials;
51. “*draw a line in the sand*” - to set a strict limit or boundary beyond which one will not proceed;
52. “*drop the ball*” - to make a mistake;
53. “*drop the bomb*” - to do or say something that is very shocking and unexpected;
54. “*eat crow*” - to admit that you were wrong;
55. “*eat like a horse*” - to eat a lot of food;
56. “*face the music*” - to meet an unpleasant situation, a danger, or the consequences of one's actions;
57. “*fair and square*” - in an honest way and without any doubt;
58. “*feast your eyes on something/someone*” - to look at someone or something with great enjoyment;
59. “*feel something in your bones*” - to believe something very strongly;
60. “*fight fire with fire*” - to use the same methods as someone else in order to defeat them;
61. “*fight tooth and nail*” - to try very hard to get something you want;

62. “*filibuster*” - the practice of making speeches to delay or stop a new law from being passed in American politics;
63. “*fine-tune*” - to make very small changes to something in order to make it work as well as possible;
64. “*footloose and fancy-free*” - to be able to go anywhere and do anything that one wants; carefree;
65. “*front-runner*” - the person, animal, or organization that is most likely to win something;
66. “*full-court press*” - an all-out effort to exert pressure;
67. “*gerrymander*” - to divide (a geographic area) into voting districts in a way that gives one party an unfair advantage in elections;
68. “*get down to business*” - to focus on work immediately;
69. “*get in the groove*” - to be or start operating or performing successfully;
70. “*get things off the ground*” - to successfully start a project;
71. “*get your hands dirty*” - practical involvement;
72. “*ghost town*” - a town where few or no people now live;
73. “*give it a shot*” - to attempt something;
74. “*give up the ghost*” - to die;
75. “*go against the grain*” - to do something contrary to natural inclination, standard behavior, or prevailing trends;
76. “*go haywire*” - to stop working correctly;
77. “*go out on a limb*” - to take a risk;
78. “*go to bat for (someone)*” - to support someone when the person needs help;
79. “*go/sell like hotcakes*” - to be bought quickly and in large numbers;
80. “*gravy train*” - a way of making money quickly, easily and often dishonestly;
81. “*Hail Mary*” / “*Hail Mary pass*” - a final, usually drastic or risky effort to avoid failure or defeat that has a low probability of success, typically done in desperation;

82. “*hands-on*” - involving direct practical experience;
83. “*have an ax to grind*” - to have a selfish reason or strong opinion that influences your actions;
84. “*have bats in the belfry*” - to be silly and slightly crazy and behave in a confused way;
85. “*have egg on your face*” - to look stupid because of something that you have done;
86. “*have/got it made*” - to have no problems; to have achieved success;
87. “*hit the ground running*” - to start quickly and effectively;
88. “*hit the hay*” - to go to bed in order to sleep;
89. “*hit the jackpot*” - to achieve major success;
90. “*hit/press/push the panic button*” - to do something quickly without thinking about it in order to deal with a difficult or worrying situation;
91. “*hold your horses*” - to stop or wait;
92. “*idiot box*” - pejorative expression for television;
93. “*in a New York minute*” - very quickly, instantly, or in a remarkably short period of time;
94. “*in cold blood*” - to kill in a way that seems especially cruel because it seems to show no emotion;
95. “*in high spirits*” - to be extremely happy;
96. “*in the spotlight*” - the center of attention.
97. “*in the weeds*” - with so many problems or so much work that you are finding it difficult to deal with something;
98. “*Indian summer*” - a period of calm, warm weather that sometimes happens in the early autumn;
99. “*it's the thought that counts*” - good or kind intentions are the most important thing, even if what you do or give someone is not perfect;
100. “*jam session*” - an informal or impromptu gathering of musicians in which they play unrehearsed or improvised music together;
101. “*keep (one's) nose to the grindstone*” - to work hard, persistent effort;

102. *“keep the home fires burning”* - to keep things going at one's home or other central location;
103. *“keep your ear to the ground”* - to pay attention to everything that is happening around you;
104. *“knuckle down”* - to focus and work hard;
105. *“lame duck”* - someone or something that needs help.
106. *“land on your feet”* - to be successful or lucky, especially after a period of not having success or luck;
107. *“lay new foundations”* to establish stable, new and inclusive social and political standards for the future;
108. *“learn/know the ropes”* - to learn/know how to do a job or activity;
109. *“lit up like a Christmas tree”* - to suddenly appear very happy, excited, or animated;
110. *“Logrolling”* - the practice of voting for something that someone else wants in return for them voting for something that you want;
111. *“loose lips sink ships”* - if you speak indiscreetly about confidential or sensitive information, someone might be listening who could use it against you;
112. *“make (something) from scratch”* - create success starting from nothing;
113. *“make no bones about something”* - not to try to hide your feelings;
114. *“make someone's blood run cold”* - to terrify someone;
115. *“march to (the beat of) (one's) own drum”* - to do something, act, or behave in a manner that does not conform to the standard, prevalent, or popular societal norm.
116. *“mend fences”* - to try to be friendly again with someone after an argument;
117. *“move the goalposts”* - to alter the rules or parameters of a situation in such a way as to suit one's needs or objectives, making it more difficult for someone else to succeed, keep pace, or achieve an opposing objective;
118. *“mutually assured destruction”* - the situation in which two very powerful countries have enough nuclear weapons to destroy each other;

119. *“not have a snowball's chance in hell”* - to be completely unable to achieve something;
120. *“not have a/the ghost of a chance”* - to have no chance at all;
121. *“not worth a Continental”* - completely worthless or useless;
122. *“on deck”* - ready or available (to do something);
123. *“on the ball”* - attentive, knowledgeable and quick to take action;
124. *“on the cusp of a new golden age”* - a vision for the immediate future as the next highly anticipated stop on a national timeline;
125. *“on the go”* - busy and active;
126. *“paddle your own canoe”* - to be independent and do not need help from anyone else;
127. *“pie in the sky”* - something that you hope will happen but is very unlikely to happen;
128. *“play possum”* - to pretend to be dead or sleeping so that someone will not annoy or attack you;
129. *“playing the card”* - the strategic use of demographic or identity-based issues for political leverage;
130. *“pork-barrel spending”* - a bill or project requiring considerable government spending in a locality to the benefit of the legislator's constituents;
131. *“pull/haul yourself up by the/your (own) bootstraps”* - to improve your situation without any help from other people;
132. *“pulling their punches”* - political debates as boxing matches, used to critique candidates who hold back;
133. *“put the finishing touches on”* - to add the final improvements to something;
134. *“put/stick the knife into someone”* - to be unpleasant about someone, or try to harm someone;
135. *“raise someone from the dead”* - to make a dead person start living again;
136. *“rebuild the nation”* - collectively restore and improve the country together;

137. “*repair the system*” - to fix current institutional flaws through maintenance;
138. “*roll with the punches*” - to adapt to obstacles while pursuing success;
139. “*run in the family*” - a trait or habit common emphasizes gratitude, personal;
140. “*sanewashing*” - the practice of making irrational, extreme, or otherwise problematic people or ideas appear more reasonable or normal than they really are.
141. “*shoot from the hip*” - to speak in a very direct and honest way;
142. “*skeleton crew*” - the smallest number of people needed to keep a business or organization operating;
143. “*skeleton in the/your closet*” - an embarrassing secret;
144. “*slam dunk*” - a forceful, dramatic success or accomplishment, especially one that is completed handily or easily.
145. “*smart cookie*” - a clever person who makes good decisions;
146. “*smear campaign*” - a planned attempt to harm the reputation of a person or company by telling lies about them;
147. “*smear campaign*” - a planned attempt to harm the reputation of a person or company by telling lies about them;
148. “*smoke the peace pipe*” - to settle a dispute, end an argument;
149. “*snowflake*” - is used by right-wing people to insult liberal or progressive people;
150. “*snowflake*” - is used by right-wing people to insult liberal or progressive people;
151. “*song and dance*” - a long and elaborate explanation or presentation;
152. “*stake a claim*” - to state or record one's claim on someone or something;
153. “*stand on your own (two) feet*” - be or become self-reliant or independent;
154. “*stand out in a/the crowd*” - to distinguish oneself through achievement;
155. “*stand/walk tall*” - to act in a proud and confident way;
156. “*steal the limelight*” - to garner attention or praise at the expense or to the exclusion of someone or something else;

157. “*step up to the plate*” - to take responsibility for something that needs to be done
158. “*stew (in your own juices)*” - to think about or suffer the results of your own actions, without anyone giving you any help;
159. “*stick to (one’s) guns*” - to maintain your principles;
160. “*strike at the heart of something*” - to damage something severely by attacking the most important part of it;
161. “*strike it rich*” - to become wealthy or successful;
162. “*strike/strike out*” - to describe a severe political failure or missed legislative opportunity;
163. “*stuffed like a turkey*” - feeling extremely full from eating a lot of food;
164. “*stump speech*” - a speech that is made many times by a politician who is traveling to different places during a campaign for election.
165. “*sweat blood*” - extreme effort;
166. “*swing for the fences*” - to put forward one's maximum amount of effort or energy (into or toward something); to act or perform with great intensity or effort;
167. “*swing state*” - a state that votes in roughly equal proportion for candidates of both the Democratic and Republican Parties and whose influence on the election has the power to determine the outcome.
168. “*take centre stage*” - to be the main focus;
169. “*take the bull by the horns*” - to do something difficult in a brave and determined way;
170. “*take the bull by the horns*” - to face challenges directly;
171. “*taking someone for a ride*” - to deceive or cheat someone;
172. “*talk turkey*” - to discuss something honestly and directly;
173. “*the bottom line*” - the final, most important result;
174. “*the more the merrier*” - an occasion will be more enjoyable if a lot of people are there;
175. “*the whole enchilada*” - everything that could possibly be included;

176. “*the whole nine yards*” - the entirety of what's possible or available; all the related elements of something;
177. “*think on your feet*” - to be able to think clearly in times of stress, especially when forming a solution to a pressing problem;
178. “*think outside the box*” - to think imaginatively using new ideas instead of traditional or expected ideas;
179. “*throw down the gauntlet*” - to invite someone to fight or compete with you;
180. “*throwing a curve ball*” - to do something unexpected or deceptive that surprises, confuses, thwarts, or outwits one;
181. “*time is money*” - time is a valuable commodity, so we should be as quick or expeditious as possible;
182. “*'tis the season*” - used to indicate that something is appropriate to or indicative of the Christmas season;
183. “*to hit pay dirt*” - to discover something of value;
184. “*to pan out*” - to conclude in a successful or pleasing manner; to work out;
185. “*to pinch-hit*” - to do something for someone because they are suddenly unable to do it;
186. “*top banana*” - the most powerful, important, or dominant person in a group, organization, or project;
187. “*touchdown*” - significant success in any undertaking since it is the leading way of scoring in the sport.
188. “*tough cookie*” - a person who is able to deal with difficult situations and not be easily defeated, frightened, or upset;
189. “*turn over a new leaf*” - to start behaving in a better way;
190. “*two-horse race*” - narrowly contested, highly competitive election between just two primary candidates;
191. “*under the wire*” - to do something at the last possible moment;

192. “*upstage someone*” - to take people's attention away from someone and make them listen to or look at you instead;
193. “*wage a campaign*” - if a person, group, or country wages a campaign or a war, they start it and continue it over a period of time;
194. “*wage a campaign*” - if a person, group, or country wages a campaign or a war, they start it and continue it over a period of time;
195. “*wait for (one's) ship to come in*” - to wait for the opportunity to succeed;
196. “*wake up & smell coffee*” - to tell someone that they are wrong about a particular situation and must realize what is really happening;
197. “*walk the walk*” - to act, not just talk;
198. “*we must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately*” - the group must remain united and support each other;
199. “*whistle past the graveyard*” - to ignore something frightening;
200. “*witch hunt*” - an attempt to find and punish people whose opinions are unpopular and who are said to be a danger to society;
201. “*with bells on*” - to do something or go somewhere with bells on is to do it or go there eagerly;
202. “*work your fingers to the bone*” - to work extremely hard, especially for a long time;