

METAPHORICAL REPRESENTATION OF HUMAN STATES IN ENGLISH IDIOMS

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Abstract. *This article shows that “English idioms that describe a person’s state”. It includes a human’s physical, emotional, and psychological states. Idioms play an important role in understanding how language reflects human experiences. Many linguists such as Fernando, Nunberg, Gibbs, Lakoff & Johnson have studied idioms and their figurative meanings. This article explains their contributions and analyzes how idioms help express complex human being emotions in a simple, memorable way.*

Keywords: *Idioms, figurative language, emotional state, linguistics, metaphor, phraseology, person’s condition.*

Idioms constitute a central element of natural language, yet their meanings often extend far beyond their literal components. Idioms describing personal states—such as mood, physical condition, or mental attitude—play a crucial communicative and cognitive role. Expressions like “down in the dumps”, “brusting with energy”, “on edge”, or “at breaking point” capture complex states through metaphorical imagery. Such idioms demonstrate how language conceptualizes abstract human experiences through concrete metaphorical structures.

Linguistic research has shown that idioms are not merely decorative features of language; they are essential for understanding how express subjective experiences. This article examines theoretical approaches to idioms, focusing on cognitive-linguistic frameworks, semantic analysis, and corpus-based studies. The review also highlights contributions of major scholars who explored idioms as cultural, psychological, and structural phenomena.

Literature Review. Research on idioms spans several linguistic subfields, including cognitive linguistics, phraseology, psycholinguistics, and corpus linguistics.

1. Cognitive-Linguistic Approaches (Lakoff & Johnson 1980)

Lakoff and Johnson’s Conceptual metaphor Theory laid the foundation for understanding idioms as reflections of metaphorical thought rather than linguistic irregularities.





Idioms such as:

- “feelling down”- emotional states and vertical orientations
- “in high spirits”- positive states are up

Emotional idioms rely on universal metaphorical patterns like Anger is heat boiling with anger”) or happiness is light (“radiant with joy “).

Gibbs discovered that idioms are processed faster than literal expressions because they are stored mentally as fixed conceptual units. He also demonstrated that people interpret idioms based on both their figurative meaning and their underlying conceptual metaphor. Glucksberg argued that idioms function as “categorical assertions,” placing individuals into conceptual categories (e.g., “He ‘s a dark horse”-a person who is mysterious or unpredictable).

Fernando emphasized that idioms describing personal states belong to a broader system of phraseological units. She classified idioms into pure, semi-literal, and quasi-metaphorical categories, explaining how each interacts with meaning. Nunberg, Sag, and Wasow showed that many idioms are decomposable, meaning their parts contribute to figurative interpretation-e.g., “breaks someone’s heart” involves conceptualizing emotional pain as physical damage.

Moon’s corpus-based research revealed that idioms describing emotions and states occur with high frequency, especially in spoken discourse. Cowie analyzed idioms within bilingual dictionaries, showing that idioms often reflect cultural norms; for instance, English idioms for stress (“under pressure,” “at the end of one’s rope”) differ from those in other cultures.

Analysis: English phraseological units with the meaning of praise in English :the cat’s whiskers, cream of the crop, the top banana, the icing on the cake, the cherry on top, the frosting on the cupcake , sing the praises of someone, call a spade spade, fish for a compliment, blow’s one’s own horn.

Tickled pink - very much pleased ,or entertained.(Dictionary of American idioms, 703) This expression is used in cases of being very happy.

Idioms often rely on metaphorical extensions rather than literal meaning.

“Over the moon” - extreme happiness

“Down in the dump” - depression or sadness

“On pins and needles” - nervous anticipation

These idioms draw upon concrete sensory experiences (height, location, physical discomfort) to express abstract emotions.

Cognitive interpretation-idioms reflect underlying conceptual metaphors.





Like: anxiety is tension-“on edge,” “under the strain” sadness is downward movement-“feeling low,” “downcast “ fear is coldness-“cold feet”.These metaphors highlight universal bodily experiences that structure emotional language.

Pragmatic Functions-idioms serve multiple communicative functions:

- 1.They compress complex feelings into short expressions.
- 2.They act as markers of shared cultural knowledge.
- 3.They create social solidarity between speakers.

For instance, saying “ I’m under the weather”conveys not only physical discomfort but also an expectation of empathy.

Cultural dimensions - idioms are shaped by cultural symbolism.English idioms such as “ a heavy heart,”“light-hearted,”“broken-hearted” reflect Western cultural associations between the heart and emotions.Nature-related idioms (“ a stormy mood”) show the link between environmental imagery and emotional states in English-speaking cultures.

Examples for every categories:

Physical state: “out of breath”, “ fit as a fiddle”

Emotional state:”blue”, “over the moon”

Mental state: “lost in thought”, “at one’s wit’s end”

These idioms confirm that personal states are conceptualized metaphorically in English and deeply rooted in shared human experiences.

Conclusion. Idioms describing a person’s state represent a rich intersection of language,cognition, and culture.They allow speakers to articulate complex physical,emotional,and psychological experiences through metaphorically motivated expressions.The work of scholars such as Lakoff,Johnson,Gibbs,Fernando ,Moon,and

Cowie presented that idioms are cognitively structured, culturally informed, and pragmatically valuable.Understanding these idioms enhances linguistic competence, improves cross-cultural communication, and deepens insight into how language reflects human mental processes. Continued research on idioms remains crucial for exploring the relationship between figurative language and human cognition

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