

ANALYSIS OF THE MONEY-RELATED IDIOMS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The article explores the thematic and structural aspects of idioms related to the concept of “money” in the English language. Money has long been an integral part of human activity and since languages are often reflections of the culture, values and beliefs of the societies, we can find various idioms and set expressions that use money-related lexical units in the English language. The study of idioms has a long history in linguistics. Many prominent scholars dedicated their works to the study and analysis of this very peculiar, expressive and complex linguistic phenomenon. However, despite the considerable efforts from the scholars, we should point out that there are still controversies among the linguists about the definition, identification of the basic characteristics or classification of idioms. The given paper presents an overview of the definitions existing in various linguistic dictionaries as well as in the works of prominent linguists and researchers. The article also examines the most common approaches to the classification of phraseological units suggested by various scholars based on different principles and criteria. These are: the thematic, semantic, structural or structural-semantic principles of classification. The aim of our study was to identify and collect money-related idioms in the English language and analyze these phraseological units from lexical-semantic and structural point of view.

Keywords: idioms, set expressions, phraseological units, money-related idioms, English language

Introduction

The study of idioms has a long history in linguistics. Many prominent scholars dedicated their works to the study and analysis of this very peculiar, expressive and complex linguistic phenomenon. However, despite the considerable efforts from the scholars, we should mention that there are still controversies among the linguists about the definition, identification of some basic characteristics or classification of idioms. Idioms occur frequently in all languages and English is no exception. It should be pointed out that the English language is especially abundant in idioms. As we have already mentioned above, due to the heterogeneity of idioms, it is difficult to either give precise definition or identify the characteristic features of idioms. Therefore, idioms still need further examination and analysis.

This paper presents a short overview of the main theories and approaches existing in the study of the phraseological units or idioms and analyzes money-related idioms in the English language according to the thematic and structural approach.

What is an idiom?

Having looked at several linguistic dictionary definitions of an idiom, it should be pointed out that they suggest a more general definition of an idiom than a detailed and specific one. The main idea is that an idiom is a set expression which functions as a single unit and whose overall meaning does not correspond to the combined meanings of its component parts.

In Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics, an idiom is defined as “an expression which functions as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separate parts.” (Richards, & Schmidt, 2002, p.246). According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics, an idiom is “A set expression in which two or more words are syntactically related, but with a meaning like that of a single lexical unit.” (Matthews, 2007). As for the Cambridge Dictionary of Linguistics, here, idioms are “... fixed expressions whose meaning cannot be guessed from their individual words” (Brown & Miller, 2013, p.173). A more detailed definition is suggested by David Crystal in his Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics. According to Crystal (2008), an idiom is “A term used in grammar and lexicology to refer to a sequence of words which is semantically and often syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit. From a semantic viewpoint, the meanings of the individual words cannot be summed to produce the meaning of the idiomatic expression as a whole. From a syntactic viewpoint, the words often do not permit the usual variability they display in other contexts...” (Crystal, 2008, p. 236). Finally, Routledge dictionary of language and linguistics provides a more comprehensive definition of an idiom, and what is more, it identifies some characteristic features of these set expressions as well. An idiom is “a set, multi-elemental group of words, or lexical entity with the following characteristics: (a) the complete meaning cannot be derived from the meaning of the individual elements, e.g. to have a crush on someone (‘to be in love with someone’); (b) the substitution of single elements does not bring about a systematic change of meaning (which is not true of non-idiomatic syntagms), e.g. *to have a smash on someone; (c) a literal reading results in a homophonic non-idiomatic variant, to which conditions (a) and (b) no longer apply (metaphor). Frequently there is a diachronic connection between the literal reading and the idiomatic reading (idiomatization). In such cases, the treatment of the idiom as an unanalyzable lexical entity is insufficient. Depending upon the theoretical preconception, sayings, figures of speech, nominal constructions, and twin formulas are all subsumed under idioms.” (Busmann, 1996, p.533).

Russian scholars have made significant contribution to the study of phraseological units. It should be mentioned that most Russian scholars use the term "phraseological unit" and the term "idiom" widely used by western scholars has comparatively recently found its way into Russian phraseology but is applied mostly to only a certain type of phraseological unit (Antrushina, Afanasyeva, & Morozova, 1999, p.228). In Russian linguistics the following terms are used to denote idioms: “set-expressions, set-phrases, phrases, fixed word-groups, collocations.” (Antrushina, Afanasyeva, & Morozova, 1999, p.228).

Here are the definitions of idioms proposed by some other scholars as well: “The term "idiom", both in this country and abroad, is mostly applied to phraseological units with completely transferred meanings, that is, to the ones in which the meaning of the whole unit does not correspond to the current meanings of the components.” (Antrushina, Afanasyeva, & Morozova, 1999, p.232). “The term idioms generally implies that the essential feature of the linguistic units under consideration is idiomaticity or lack of motivation.” (Ginzburg, Khidekel, Knyazeva, & Sankin, 1979, p.74)

Classification of idioms

Due to idioms' heterogeneous and complex nature, linguists have faced a significant challenge of both defining idioms and identifying the basic characteristics in order to arrange them in certain classes. In linguistic literature there are various approaches to the classification of phraseological units suggested by various scholars based on different principles and criteria. We will briefly discuss some of the prominent ones.

One of the most common approaches of classifying phraseological units is the **thematic principle** when idioms are grouped according to their source of origin. Smith (1995) has grouped the phraseological units based on the themes they are referring to. These are the particular sphere of human activity, natural phenomena, etc. the names of domestic and wild animals, arts, culture, birds, sport, cooking, agriculture, fishermen, and sailors. Many English and American dictionaries and phrasebooks use this approach in compiling the lists of idioms. However, this approach has its drawbacks. It does not take into consideration the linguistic characteristic features of the phraseological units.

Another significant classification system of phraseological units was offered by Russian Academician Vinogradov (Arnold, 1986, p.170). His classification is based on the **semantic principles**. He grouped phraseological units into three categories: 1. **Phraseological fusions** are word-groups with a completely changed meaning. Their meaning cannot be guessed from the meanings of separate words. They are demotivated, that is, their meaning cannot be deduced from the meanings of the constituent parts; 2. **Phraseological unities** are word-groups with completely changed meaning. But the meaning of the unit can be understood from the parts of the unit. They are motivated units or, putting it another way, the meaning of the whole unit can be deduced from the meanings of the constituent parts; 3. **Phraseological combinations** are word-groups with partially changed meaning. They may be said to be clearly motivated, that is, the meaning of the unit can be easily deduced from the meanings of its constituents.

The next approach towards the classification of phraseological units is **the structural principle** which is based on their ability to perform the same syntactical functions as words. In the traditional structural approach, the following principal groups of phraseological units are distinguishable (Antrushina, Afanasyeva, & Morozova, 1999, p.248):

1. **Verbal.** E. g. to run for one's (dear) life
2. **Substantive.** E. g. dog's life
3. **Adjectival.** E. g. high and mighty
4. **Adverbial.** E. g. high and low, by hook or by crook
5. **Interjectional.** E. g. my God; goodness gracious!

Lastly, one of the latest classification systems of phraseological units was suggested by Koonin (1970) and it is based on the combined structural-semantic principle. Phraseological units are classified into the following four classes according to their function in communication determined by their structural-semantic characteristics:

1. **Nominative phraseological units:** a) **Substantive** b) **Adjectival** c) **Adverbial** d) **Prepositional**
2. **Nominative-communicative phraseological units:** units contain a verb.
3. **Phraseological units which are neither nominative nor communicative:** phraseological units express the speaker's emotions and attitude to things.
4. **Communicative phraseological units** are represented by proverbs and sayings.

As we can see, phraseological units or idioms can be **classified** according to several criteria and principles: thematic principle; semantic principle; structural or structural-semantic principle. In the given paper, we classify the analyzed money-related idioms based on the thematic and structural principle.

Methodology

Materials for analysis were collected and taken from the following print collections of English language dictionaries of idioms:

1. The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms. (2013)
2. McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs. (2005)
3. The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms. (2004)
4. Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms. (1998)
5. Collins Cobuild Dictionary of Idioms. (1997)
6. The Penguin Dictionary of English Idioms. (1994)

A total of **59** idioms and idiomatic expressions related to the concept of "**money**" were collected and analyzed.

One of the aims of our study was to identify idiomatic expressions containing the concept of money in the English language. For this purpose, we first identified the lexical units which are related to the means of payment/ money. We have consulted Roget's 21st Century Thesaurus (Kipfer, 2005) which represents a semantic hierarchy of the most common concepts that are used in American English as it is spoken and written today. According to the given thesaurus, lexical units that are related to the concept of "**money**" (**means of payment**) are grouped under the category of Monetary and Financial Affairs which is included in much larger

category: Fields of Human Activity. We have identified the following **38 lexical units** under the category of money:

money [n] currency accepted as exchange for goods, services - *almighty dollar, banknote, bankroll, bill, bread, bucks, capital, cash, check, chips, coin, coinage, dough, finances, fund, funds, gold, gravy, greenback, hard cash, legal tender, loot, medium of exchange, pay, payment, pesos, property, resources, riches, roll, salary, silver, specie, treasure, wad, wage, wealth, wherewithal*. (Roget's 21st Century Thesaurus, 2005, p.552).

The next step in our study was to find and collect idioms and idiomatic expressions containing these lexical units. We found idioms containing the following lexical units: **money** (18 units), **penny** (11 units), **cash** (7 units), **dime** (4 units), **bill** (3 units), **chips** (3 units), **coin** (2 units), **buck(s)** (2 units), **nickel** (2 units), **dollars** (2 units), **cent(s)** (2 units), **mint** (2 units), **cheque, funds, pound, change** (1 unit).

Finally, we analyzed the collected idioms and grouped them according to their structural characteristics.

Analysis and results

A total of **59** idioms and idiomatic expressions related to “money” were collected and analyzed.

The study of the material allows us to distinguish the following principal groups of idioms: **verbal, substantive, adjectival and adverbial**:

1. Verbal:

a) **Verb +Noun: foot the bill** - to pay for something, especially something expensive; **fill/fit the bill** - to be exactly what is needed in a particular situation; **spend a penny** - pay a penny for the use of a public toilet; **count the pennies** - be careful about how much you spend; to adhere to a strict budget. (Variants of this expression are **watch the pennies** and **pinch the pennies**); **coin money / mint money** – make a great deal of money easily or very quickly; **have had your chips** - to die or be killed; to have lost your position, importance, or power.

b) **Noun +Verb: penny drops** — is used to indicate that someone has finally realized something; **money talks** – is used to say that money has a strong influence on people's actions and decisions.

c) **Verb + postpositive: cash in on** – to get money or another advantage from an event or situation, often in an unfair way.

d) **Verb + and +Verb: nickel and dime** - to damage someone or something either by taking away many small amounts of money or by giving too much attention to details.

e) **Verb +Noun +Preposition: knock some money off** – to offer a reduction in price; **put money on** – 1) place a bet on something; 2) have confidence in the truth or success of something; **throw money at something** - try to solve a problem by recklessly spending more money on it, without due consideration of what is required; **drop the dime on** - inform on

someone to the police; **pour money down the drain** - to waste or squander money; to spend money foolishly or carelessly.

f) **Verb +(one's)+ Noun +(Preposition): throw (your) money around** - to spend money, especially in an obvious and careless way, on things that are not necessary; **get no change out of someone** - to get no help at all from someone; fail to get information or a desired reaction from.

g) **Verb + one +Noun : to give someone a run for his money** - to not allow someone to win easily; **sell someone a bill of goods** - to deceive someone into buying or believing something that has no value.

h) **Verb + Adjective +Noun: earn an honest penny** - earn money by fair means, especially by hard work; **make a fast buck** - earn money easily and quickly; **bet (your) bottom dollar** - said to emphasize that you are absolutely certain that something will happen or that something is true.

i) **Verb + subordinate clause: put your money where your mouth is** - to show by your actions and not just your words that you support or believe in something.

2. Substantive:

a) **Noun + Noun: cash cow** - a business, investment, or product that provides a steady income or profit; **smart money** - 1) money that is bet (= risked) or invested by people who know a lot about a subject; 2) the people who know a lot about a subject; **hush money** - money paid to someone to prevent them from disclosing embarrassing or discreditable information; **penny pincher** - a person who is extremely frugal or stingy; **money spinner** - a product, business, or idea that makes a lot of money.

b) **Determiner + Noun + Noun: (your) two cents' worth** - your opinion about something, when other people do not want to hear it; (The British expression is “**your two penn'orth**”).

c) **Noun + Preposition + Noun : pennies from heaven** - unexpected benefits, especially financial ones; **Cash on the barrelhead / barrel; cash on the line** - Immediate payment; **Cash on the nail** - is a British idiom that means immediate payment; payment without any delay; **money from home** - 1) easily gotten money; 2) something as welcome as long-awaited money from home; **money for jam** - money earned for little or no effort; an easy task; **other side of the coin** - an opposing view; the opposite or contrasting aspect of a matter.

d) **Adjective +Noun : quick buck** - money which was easy to make; **penny-farthing organization** - an organization that is managed inefficiently for lack of money or resources; **ready money** - money that is immediately available; **wooden nickel** - a useless thing; thing of no value; **pretty penny** - a large sum of money; **blank cheque** - complete freedom of action; **hard cash / cold cash** - money that a person has and can use immediately; money in the form of bills and coins rather than checks or credit cards.

- e) **Noun + Infinitive clause: a licence to print money** – a very lucrative commercial activity, regarded as requiring little effort.

3. Adjectival:

- a) **Adjective + and + Adjective : penny-wise and pound-foolish** - careful and economical in small matters while being wasteful or extravagant in large ones.
- b) **Noun +(and) + Noun: a dime a dozen** - very common and of no particular value; abundant; cheap and common; **Dollars and cents** - considered strictly in terms of money.
- c) **Preposition + Noun: in the chips** – wealthy and rich, especially unexpectedly; **(right) on the money** - right about something/someone; accurate; correct.
- d) **Preposition + Adjective + Noun: in mint condition** – as good as new; perfect.
- e) **Adjective + Preposition + Noun: strapped for cash** – without any or very much money at the moment; broke.

4. Adverbial:

- a) **Preposition + Noun: on a dime** - (of a manoeuvre that can be performed by a moving vehicle or person) within a small area or short distance; quickly or instantly; **in funds** - having money to spend; **for my money** - in my opinion or judgement.
- b) **Conj + clause: when the chips are down** - when you find yourself in a very serious and difficult situation.

Conclusion

The research has shown that the idioms with the concept of “*money*” found in the English language contain the following lexical units: **money** (18 units), **penny** (11 units), **cash** (7 units), **dime** (4 units), **bill** (3 units), **chips** (3 units), **coin** (2 units), **buck(s)** (2 units), **nickel** (2 units), **dollars** (2 units), **cent(s)** (2 units), **mint** (2 units), **cheque**, **funds**, **pound**, **change** (1 unit).

As for the structure, we can distinguish **verbal**, **substantive**, **adjectival** and **adverbial** groups of idioms where the verbal one represents the largest group. The most common combination found in this group is **Verb + Noun** type of idioms.

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