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IDIOMS IN THE LIGHT OF THE SPEECH ACTS THEORY

This research investigates idiomatic expressions in English in the light of speech act theory, elucidating their pragmatic functions. Against the backdrop of the anthropocentric paradigm, linguistic dynamics are examined, focusing on the interrelation between language and thought, culture, society, and psychology. Pragmatics, as the analytical lens, emphasizes the significance of discerning communicative intent, establishing a vital connection to the illocutionary acts expressed by idiomatic expressions. The foundational theories of Austin and Searle in speech act theory provide the theoretical underpinning, accentuating the dual role of language and speech in both expressing propositions and performing actions.

The authors of the article identify and analyze 48 idiomatic expressions, strategically categorizing them into representative, expressive, commissive, and directive speech acts. Among these, representative speech acts dominate, covering diverse functions such as describing, complaining, stating, concluding, and swearing. Expressive acts are used to convey various emotions embodied in the varieties of thanking, offering condolences, showing sympathy, expressing regret, and providing excuses, while commissive acts materialize in the forms of agreement or opposition. Directives, as a significant category, prompt specific actions from the interlocutor, represented by commands, requests, suggestions, advice, orders, invitations, warnings.

This comprehensive analysis not only contributes to understanding the complex array of idiomatic expressions used in speech acts but also enhances our comprehension of their role and pragmatic function in communication. The findings resonate with contemporary research trends in linguistic analysis and pragmatics, revealing the pragmatic functions of idiomatic expressions within diverse speech acts. The implications of this research extend to enriching our understanding of the intricate connections between language and various facets of human experience, contributing to the linguistic analysis and pragmatics.

Key words: idiom, speech act, representative, expressive, commissive, directive.

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ІДІОМАТИЧНІ ВИРАЗИ В КОНТЕКСТІ ТЕОРІЇ МОВНИХ АКТІВ

Це дослідження має на меті проаналізувати прагматичні функції ідіоматичних виразів в англійській мові з урахуванням теорії мовленнєвих актів. Лінгвістична динаміка ідіоматичних виразів розглядається згідно з антропоцентричною парадигмою, яка враховує взаємозв'язок мови з суспільством, людським мисленням, куль-турою, та психологією. Підкреслено важливість визначення комунікативного наміру через призму прагматики, встановлення суттєвого зв'язку з іллокутивними актами, що виражені ідіоматичними висловами, та їхній вплив

на мовлення. Фундаментальні праці Дж. Остіна і Дж. Серля з теорії мовленнєвих актів становлять теоретичну основу дослідження, відзначаючи подвійну роль мови і мовлення як у вираженні пропозицій, так і в реалізації дій.

Автори статті виокремлюють та аналізують 48 ідіоматичних висловів, класифікуючи їх як репрезентативні, експресивні, комісивні та директивні мовленнєві акти. З-поміж них домінують репрезентативні мовленнєві акти, які охоплюють різноманітні комунікативні функції, такі як опис, скарга, ствердження, висновок і присяга. Експресивні акти використовуються для передачі різних емоцій, втілених у різновидах подяки, співчуття, висловлення жалю, виправдання, тоді як комісивні акти матеріалізуються у формах згоди або заперечення. Директиви як значуща категорія спонукають співрозмовника до конкретних дій. Ці мовленнєві акти представлені командами, проханнями, пропозиціями, порадами, наказами, запрошеннями, застереженнями.

Проведений комплексний аналіз не лише сприяє розумінню складного розмаїття ідіоматичних виразів, що використовуються в мовленнєвих актах, але й поглиблює наше розуміння їхньої ролі та прагматичної функції в комунікації. Результати дослідження віддзеркалюють сучасні тенденції лінгвістичного та прагматичного аналізу, розкриваючи прагматичні функції ідіоматичних виразів у різноманітних мовленнєвих актах. Отримані результати збагачують розуміння складних зв'язків між мовою та різними аспектами людського досвіду, сприяючи розвитку лінгвістичного аналізу та теорії мовленнєвих актів.

Ключові слова: *ідіома, мовленнєвий акт, репрезентатив, експресив, комісив, директив.*

Problem statement. The emergence of the anthropocentric paradigm has prompted a shift in linguistic research towards a focus on humanity. Ukrainian and foreign linguists have dedicated their scientific endeavors to exploring this direction. The growing interest lies not only in the internal dynamics of language but also in the intricate interplay between language and thought, language and culture, language and society, as well as language and psychology (Melnyk et al. 2022: 92).

Pragmatics explores the intricacies of meaning within the context of spoken or written language. This examination encompasses social, situational, and textual dimensions. Consequently, the correlation between linguistic structure and the communicative purpose holds significant importance in the field of pragmatics. Paltridge points to the necessity of discerning the communicative intent of an utterance, elucidating what it accomplishes within a specific context to appropriately categorize it within the broader discourse (Paltridge 2021). Given that understanding idiomatic expressions requires transcending literal meanings to grasp a holistic meaning that fulfills a specific pragmatic function, it is plausible to connect the analysis of pragmatic functions in idiomatic expressions to the illocutionary acts proposed by speech act theory.

Two influential contributions to the field of pragmatics include Austin's "How to do things with Words" and Searle's (1969) theory of speech acts (cited in Oishi 2006). Austin and Searle argue that language serves the purpose of "doing things" and executing actions. In his renowned work, "How to do things with Words", Austin (1962) introduces a novel perspective on analyzing meaning. According to Austin, meaning is intricately linked to linguistic conventions tied to words and sentences, the actual situational context of the speaker's expression, and the associated intentions of the speaker. He directs linguists to focus on the acts underlying utterances and meaning, proposing three types of acts: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. The locutionary act pertains to the literal meaning of an utterance or the actual words used, such as stating "it is cold in here" to refer to the temperature. The illocutionary act relates to the speaker's intention and the impact of the locutionary act or the function fulfilled by the utterance (e.g., requesting someone to turn on the heater). The perlocutionary act/effect involves the impact of the utterance on the thoughts or actions of another person (e.g., someone getting up and turning on the heater).

The term "speech act" has evolved to signify the illocutionary act, the second kind of act, which offers rich interpretations within pragmatics. Austin identifies certain verbs in English, known as performatives (e.g., order or promise), which allow the speaker to perform the action named by the verb in a specific manner. Austin categorizes illocutionary acts into five types: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives. While some argue that Austin's classification is incomplete and the categories are not mutually exclusive, it serves as a general framework for understanding illocutionary acts.

Searle (1969) focuses on elucidating the linguistic mechanisms of communication, building on Austin's work. Searle proposes a typology of speech acts based on felicitous conditions, encompassing social and cultural criteria necessary for the act to achieve its intended effect (cited in Oishi, 2006). Austin and Searle assert that utterances not only express propositions but also perform actions. Searle's typology includes representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives, rooted in illocutionary verbs. Both Austin and Searle's classifications align in some aspects, particularly in the "commissive" type.

The significance of speech act theory in this study lies in its ability to enable researchers to identify

the speech acts underlying idiomatic expressions. It provides a theoretical framework for analyzing language, as observed in the media discourse, and facilitates the examination of idiomatic expressions within a pragmatic context to determine their communicative functions. In addition, the research is relevant as it addresses the linguistic shift towards an anthropocentric paradigm, exploring the intricate connections between language and various aspects of human experience, particularly focusing on the pragmatic functions of idiomatic expressions within speech acts, thus contributing to the fields of pragmatics and linguistic analysis.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The concept of idioms can be understood through the lens of the Communicative Acts Theory, which emphasizes the role of language in shaping social interactions (Herzog 2021). Idioms, as a form of language, can be seen as communicative practices that convey specific meanings and intentions (Senkbeil 2020). These meanings are often shaped by the cultural and social context in which the idioms are used, highlighting the role of ideology in language use (Herzog 2021). Furthermore, the use of idioms can also be seen as a form of communicative demonstration, where speakers modify their actions to influence the mental representations of their audience (Senkbeil 2020). This highlights the intentional and strategic nature of idiom use in communication. The cultural component of idiomatic expressions and their role in shaping individual and collective identities further underscores their significance in communication (Myronova et al. 2022). Lastly, the multimodal and polysemiotic nature of idioms, which can be expressed through various modes of communication, adds another layer of complexity to their role in social interactions.

The **aim** of this paper is to conduct a qualitative linguistic analysis to explore idiomatic expressions in English from the perspective of speech acts, specifically aiming to determine their pragmatic functions.

Material and methods. The current research employs a qualitative linguistic analysis method to address a gap in the study and explore idiomatic expressions in English represented in discourse from the point of view of speech acts. The goal is to analyze these expressions and ascertain their pragmatic functions.

As Perry notes, qualitative research is more concerned with the distinctive characteristics of the sample itself, rather than drawing conclusions about a larger population (Perry 2011). Therefore, it provides an opportunity to illuminate a phenomenon of particular interest to the researcher. The emphasis in qualitative research lies in the description and quality of information rather than sheer quantity. Linguistic analysis is well-suited for this study as it facilitates the description of idioms in the language concerning their pragmatic functions.

The subsequent phase involves a thorough examination aimed at discerning the pragmatic functions of idiomatic expressions in connection with speech acts. The researchers categorize Searle's taxonomy of speech acts, along with their respective subcategories, which serve distinct pragmatic purposes. Subsequently, the researchers revisit each idiom, examining its contextual aspects to identify its role and function within that specific context. The next step involves aligning each idiomatic expression with the corresponding category of speech act. Consequently, idioms are classified based on their pragmatic functions, associating them with one of Searle's five speech act categories.

Presentation of the main material. The findings indicate the occurrence of 48 idiomatic expressions within the studied material serving several pragmatic functions. These functions are categorized into four speech acts according to Searle's classification: representatives, expressives, directives, and commissives. Representative speech acts are evident in 26 idiomatic expressions, fulfilling four pragmatic functions, including describing with six subcategories, complaining, stating, concluding, and swearing. Expressive speech acts are observed in 12 idiomatic expressions, addressing five pragmatic functions – thanking, condoling, sympathizing, deploring, and excusing. Commisive speech acts are found in 6 idiomatic expressions, covering two pragmatic functions: agreeing and opposing. Finally, directive speech acts are present in 4 idiomatic expressions, serving pragmatic functions of requests, suggestions, and advice. The examples of the declarative speech act are not represented in the sample.

Representatives. It is notable that instances of idiomatic expressions functioning as representatives predominate among the various examples. A total of 26 idioms are identified as performing representative speech acts, contributing to the following pragmatic functions: describing, complaining, stating, concluding, and swearing.

In accordance with Searle's classification (cited in Oishi 2006), the objective of representatives is to commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition to varying degrees. Utterances in this category are generated based on the speaker's observations, followed by the expression of facts or opinions derived from those observations. In specific dialogues, it becomes evident that speakers engage in representative speech acts by employing diverse

idiomatic expressions to fulfill various pragmatic functions, including describing, complaining, stating, concluding, and swearing. For instance, the idioms expressing the speech act of complaining include "cry your eyes out", "sing the blues", "kick up/ raise a stink", "rock the boat", "scream/yell bloody murder", "beat one's breast", "pick holes", "upset the apple cart", etc. For instance, *Do you see how the left-liberal media have screamed bloody murder over Musk's takeover of Twitter, and his new policies that serve simply to expand the discourse?" (WP)* ("scream (or yell) blue murder – make an extravagant and noisy protest, informal" (ODI 2004: 195)). In terms of speech act theory, the expression "scream bloody murder" is a linguistic tool used to perform the illocutionary act of complaining. The speaker is not merely describing the media's reaction but is actively registering a complaint about it. This use of the idiom serves to convey the speaker's strong disapproval of the media's response to Musk's takeover and the perceived impact on free discourse. The idiom adds a vivid and forceful dimension to the act of complaining, emphasizing the intensity and seriousness of the speaker's criticism.

An ***expressive speech act*** takes place during a conversation when a speaker conveys his/her emotional or psychological state to the listener. Common instances include expressing gratitude or offering an apology. Within the examined discourse, expressive speech acts play a significant role, manifesting through various subcategories of pragmatic functions, such as expressing thanks, offering condolences, showing sympathy, expressing regret, and providing excuses.

"It actually seems rather sedate, kill-wise, treating us to mere flashes of blood torrents, but no true details of evisceration as in the fabled days of gore. But – thank God for small mercies – it's over so fast!" (WP) ("be thankful (or grateful) for small mercies – be relieved that an unpleasant situation is alleviated by minor advantages" (ODI 2004: 187)). The speaker uses the idiom to convey a sense of relief or gratitude regarding a seemingly less intense or gruesome portrayal of a situation. The expression is employed to emphasize the speaker's acknowledgment of the alleviation of an unpleasant circumstance, highlighting the appreciation for the limited extent of the distressing details. This use of the idiom fits into the category of expressive speech acts, where the speaker communicates their emotional state, in this case, a combination of relief and gratitude, to the listener.

The context provided below exemplifies the pragmatic function of expressing sympathy: *Before we can figure out where anyone's standing in this quiet wetness, the refrain comes flooding. "Go easy on me, baby," Adele sings, painstakingly expanding the word "easy" into eight distinct parts" (WP)*. ("go easy on (or with) something – be sparing or cautious in your use or consumption of something, informal" (ODI 2004: 91)). The idiom is used to convey a plea for leniency or understanding, expressing vulnerability or a need for gentle treatment. The idiom "go easy on (or with) something" encapsulates the speaker's request for the listener to be cautious or sparing, emphasizing a delicate or considerate approach. In this case, the expressive speech act is manifested through Adele's lyrical choice, adding emotional depth to the communication within the song.

Commissives encompass speech acts wherein the speaker commits to a future course of action. Within the studied sample, commissive speech acts manifest in two specific pragmatic functions: agreement and opposition, for instance: *"Not only do I waste my own time and someone else's, but I am insightful — and, believe it or not, compassionate — enough to know it's extremely unfair to every date I have. It would be simpler if I call it a day before the date has even begun" (WP)* ("call it a day – decide or agree to stop doing something, either temporarily or permanently" (ODI 2004: 73)). Here, the speaker is committing to a future course of action, suggesting that it would be more straightforward to end or cease the activity before the date even starts. The idiom "call it a day" is used metaphorically in this context, indicating a decision to agree to stop pursuing or continuing with dating.

The findings indicate just an instance where idiomatic expressions represent the pragmatic function of expressing opposition: *"Rudolph W. Giuliani, President Trump's personal attorney, on Sunday rejected the prospect of Trump sitting down for an interview with special counsel Robert S. Mueller III. "Over my dead body," Giuliani said on "Fox News Sunday." "But you know, I could be dead" (WP)* ("over my dead body – used to emphasize that you completely oppose something and would do anything to prevent it from happening, informal" (ODI 2004: 75)). The idiom "over my dead body" is employed to strongly emphasize Giuliani's opposition to the proposed interview. It conveys a resolute commitment to preventing the suggested action, aligning with the commissive speech act characteristic of committing to a future course of action. The humorous remark at the end ("But you know, I could be dead") adds a touch of irony, highlighting the unpredictability of future events despite strong opposition.

Directive speech acts encompass various communicative intentions where the speaker aims

to influence or prompt a specific action from the listener. The varieties include commands, requests, suggestions, advice, orders, invitations, warnings, etc., for example: *"Don't waste your breath trying to change Trumpists' minds. Just vote" (WP)* ("waste your breath – talk or give advice without effect" (ODI 2004: 38). The speaker employs the idiom to convey a directive intention, advising against attempting to change the minds of Trumpists and instead suggesting a more effective course of action, which is to vote. This example illustrates how directive speech acts can be conveyed through idiomatic expressions, emphasizing the importance of taking a specific action (voting) while discouraging an ineffective or futile effort (trying to change recipients' minds). The idiom adds a layer of emphasis and colloquialism to the directive.

The expression "take your cue from" is used in the context of providing advice or guidance, falling within the category of directive speech acts: *"Focus on the question at hand and take your cue from the interviewer. If you feel yourself rambling, pause and then aim to conclude your point quickly"* (WP). ("take your cue from – follow the example or advice of" (ODI 2004: 68)). The speaker is instructing or advising the listener on how to handle a specific situation, which is responding to questions during an interview.

Conclusions. The research employed a qualitative linguistic analysis method, recognizing the suitability of linguistic analysis for describing idioms concerning their pragmatic functions. The emphasis was on providing a detailed description and quality of information rather than sheer quantity, aligning with the nature of qualitative research. The study disclosed that idioms serve diverse pragmatic functions falling under the categories of representatives, expressives, commissives, and directives. Among the identified idiomatic expressions, representatives emerged as the most prevalent, spanning functions such as describing, complaining, stating, concluding, and swearing. The research presented specific examples of idioms within each speech act category, accompanied by in-depth contextual analyses.

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