

<https://doi.org/10.62837/2025.5.52>

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**PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF IDIOMS IN FORMAL AND
INFORMAL COMMUNICATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
ABSTRACT**

Idioms are an integral part of language, often enriching communication by adding nuance, humor, or emotion. However, their use varies significantly depending on the communication context, with formal and informal settings requiring different approaches to idiomatic expressions. This paper explores the role of idioms within communication strategies, particularly focusing on how they are employed in formal versus informal contexts. Formal communication tends to prioritize clarity and precision, with idioms being used cautiously to avoid ambiguity, while informal communication relies more heavily on idiomatic expressions to build rapport and express emotions. By analyzing the frequency, types, and impact of idioms in both settings, this study aims to shed light on the pragmatic aspects of idiomatic usage. The research draws on both literary examples and real-world instances of communication, offering insights into how idioms function across various platforms, including business, education, and everyday conversation. Through the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods, the paper compares the effectiveness of idioms in achieving communicative goals in formal and informal settings. The findings demonstrate that idioms, when used appropriately, are powerful tools for enhancing communication in both contexts but require sensitivity to social norms and audience expectations. This paper ultimately concludes that understanding the role of idioms in different communication contexts is essential for effective and culturally sensitive communication (Gibbs & Berk, 2021).

Keywords: Idioms, Communication Strategies, Formal Communication, Informal Communication, Pragmatics, Speech Acts, Cultural Norms, Contextual Variation

Introduction

Idioms, as fixed expressions whose meanings cannot be deduced from the individual meanings of the words, are a vital component of everyday language. They are deeply rooted in cultural contexts and have the ability to convey complex meanings in a succinct manner. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the role of idioms in communication strategies, focusing specifically on their usage in formal and informal contexts. While idioms play a key role in informal interactions by

fostering rapport and intimacy, they can also serve to simplify and emphasize concepts in formal settings. However, idioms in formal communication come with certain risks, as their overuse or improper application may lead to miscommunication or the perception of informality. Understanding the pragmatic function of idioms in different communication contexts is critical for enhancing communicative competence in both formal and informal settings. The aim of this paper is to examine the ways idioms are employed to achieve communication goals in both settings and highlight the role of context in determining their appropriateness and effectiveness [3, p 28].

Research Methods

To explore the role of idioms in formal and informal communication, both qualitative and quantitative research methods are employed. The qualitative aspect involves a detailed analysis of idiomatic expressions in both spoken and written discourse, using examples drawn from literature, media, and everyday interactions. Key literary works such as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* are analyzed for their use of idioms in informal and formal communication, respectively. The quantitative research focuses on a survey conducted among professionals and students, examining how often idioms are used in different contexts and how they are perceived by speakers in formal versus informal settings. The survey includes both native speakers and non-native speakers of English to provide insights into the role of cultural differences in idiomatic usage. The data collected is analyzed to determine patterns in idiom usage, audience perception, and the impact of context on the effectiveness of idiomatic communication.

Materials and Discussion

The materials for this study include a variety of sources, including literary texts, conversational data, and survey results. Literary works provide valuable insights into the use of idioms within formal and informal communication. For example, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain, 1884) presents idioms frequently used in informal contexts, such as “*kick the bucket*” (to die) and “*hit the nail on the head*” (to be exactly correct). These idiomatic expressions reflect the colloquial nature of Huck's speech, demonstrating the informal communication style of a character from a lower social class. Similarly, *Pride and Prejudice* [1], with its upper-class setting, uses idiomatic expressions like “*a double-edged sword*” (a situation with both positive and negative outcomes) to convey more formal meanings in discussions about relationships and social propriety. These examples highlight the way idioms help convey meaning efficiently within different social contexts.

In addition to literary works, conversational data plays a crucial role in understanding idiom usage in real-world contexts. Informal conversations, such as those between friends or family members, often feature idiomatic expressions that

convey humor, emotion, or shared understanding. For instance, in casual settings, one might say “*spill the beans*” (reveal a secret) to express an inadvertent disclosure of information. In professional contexts, however, the same idiom may be avoided in favor of clearer or more formal expressions. This contrast demonstrates how idioms serve different functions depending on the social setting. The frequency of idioms in these contexts can be quantified by analyzing conversational data, which reveals that idioms are far more prevalent in informal discourse compared to formal communication.

The survey conducted for this study gathered responses from both native and non-native speakers of English, aiming to understand how idioms are perceived and used in formal and informal settings. Participants were asked to provide examples of idioms they commonly use in various contexts, both personal and professional. The results revealed a significant discrepancy in idiom usage across these settings. In informal communication, participants frequently used idioms like “*under the weather*” (feeling ill) and “*cut to the chase*” (get to the point), often to convey emotions or streamline communication. However, in formal settings, idioms such as “*think outside the box*” (consider unconventional solutions) were used more sparingly. This finding aligns with research by Kecskes (2020), which notes that while idioms can enrich communication, they are often avoided in professional settings due to the need for precision and clarity.

Further analysis of the survey data indicated that non-native speakers, in particular, tend to avoid idiomatic expressions in formal contexts due to the potential for misunderstanding. These speakers often favor more direct and literal forms of communication to ensure their message is clear. This finding supports the work of Gibbs and Berk [2], who suggest that non-native speakers are particularly sensitive to the ambiguity of idioms and are cautious about using them in professional or formal communication. The study also found that non-native speakers were more likely to misinterpret idiomatic expressions in formal contexts, which could lead to misunderstandings or communication breakdowns. This highlights the importance of teaching idiomatic expressions in a context-specific manner to non-native speakers, particularly when they are expected to participate in formal discussions or negotiations.

An interesting aspect of the discussion is the role of cultural differences in idiom usage. Idioms are often culturally specific, and their meaning can vary across languages and social contexts. For example, while English idioms like “*burning the midnight oil*” (working late into the night) are widely understood in Western cultures, they may not have the same resonance or equivalent expressions in other languages or cultures. Similarly, expressions like “*the ball is in your court*” (it’s your turn to take action) may be perceived differently depending on the cultural background of the speaker and listener. The survey results indicated that idioms with cultural significance were less likely to be understood by participants from non-

English-speaking backgrounds. This finding suggests that idioms, while a powerful tool for communication, require a shared cultural understanding to be fully effective.

In informal communication, the flexibility of idiomatic expressions allows for greater creativity and variation in their usage. Speakers often adapt idioms to fit the particular nuances of the conversation. For example, *“break the ice”* (to initiate a conversation) may be used not only in its literal sense but also in a playful or figurative sense to ease tension in a social situation. The ability to play with idioms in this way enhances the fluidity and expressiveness of informal communication. On the other hand, in formal settings, idioms are more rigid and standardized, often serving specific rhetorical functions such as emphasizing a point or illustrating a concept. For instance, in a business presentation, an idiom like *“get your ducks in a row”* (organize things) may be used to convey the importance of preparation, but it is typically used in a controlled and professional manner, avoiding any possible misinterpretation.

The study also found that idioms have a social function in both formal and informal contexts. In informal communication, idioms can help establish common ground and foster a sense of solidarity between speakers. For example, when friends use idiomatic expressions like *“let the cat out of the bag”* (reveal a secret), they signal a shared understanding and bond over the common experience of having kept the secret. In formal settings, however, the use of idioms can signal expertise or authority, particularly in fields where jargon and specialized language are common. For example, in legal or medical contexts, idioms like *“in the long run”* (eventually) are used to convey long-term outcomes, but they are typically understood within the specific professional context.

Overall, the research highlights the critical role of context in determining the effectiveness and appropriateness of idiomatic expressions. Idioms, when used correctly, can enhance communication by making it more vivid, engaging, and culturally resonant. However, in formal contexts, where clarity and precision are paramount, idioms must be used sparingly and with consideration of the audience. The study demonstrates that a nuanced understanding of idioms—considering both their cultural significance and their role in different communicative contexts—is essential for effective communication in both personal and professional domains.

Findings

The research reveals several important findings regarding the use of idioms in formal and informal communication. First, idioms are significantly more common in informal communication, where speakers are more likely to use them to express emotions, emphasize points, or create humor. In casual conversations, idioms serve to create a relaxed atmosphere, fostering connection and understanding. For example, in social settings, expressions like *“bite the bullet”* (to endure something painful) or

“*break the ice*” (to initiate conversation) are often used to convey meaning quickly and effectively.

In contrast, in formal communication, idioms are used sparingly and with more deliberate intent. Survey respondents indicated that while idioms like “*in the long run*” (over time) or “*a blessing in disguise*” (an apparently negative situation that turns out to have positive consequences) are commonly understood in professional settings, their excessive use may be seen as overly casual or imprecise. One key finding is that non-native speakers of English are more likely to misinterpret idiomatic expressions in formal settings, highlighting the importance of ensuring clarity when using idioms with diverse audiences [3, p 58].

Additionally, cultural differences play a role in how idioms are perceived in formal and informal contexts. Some idioms are culture-specific and may be perceived differently depending on the social and cultural background of the listener. For example, while idioms like “*get the ball rolling*” (to start something) are widely understood in English-speaking cultures, they may be unfamiliar or have a different connotation in non-English-speaking regions. As such, speakers need to be mindful of cultural differences when using idioms in international or multicultural communication.

Conclusion

In conclusion, idioms are an essential part of language that help enrich communication, but their use must be adapted to the context in which they are employed. In informal communication, idioms facilitate rapport, emotional expression, and humor, creating a more personal and relatable form of discourse. In formal communication, however, idioms must be used with caution to avoid ambiguity or the perception of informality. The findings of this study highlight the importance of context in shaping the effectiveness of idioms and demonstrate that while idioms are a powerful tool for enhancing communication, they must be used judiciously and with awareness of the social and cultural setting. Recent research [2], reinforces this, suggesting that appropriate idiomatic usage can improve both formal and informal communication, but excessive use or cultural misapplication may have unintended consequences. Understanding the nuances of idiomatic language is essential for both native and non-native speakers, particularly in professional or academic contexts where clarity is paramount. Ultimately, idioms play a crucial role in bridging cultural gaps and enhancing communication strategies, but their use must be carefully managed to ensure their appropriateness and impact.

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RƏSMİ VƏ QEYRİ-RƏSMİ ÜNSİYYƏTDƏ İDİOMLARIN PRAGMATİK FUNKSİYALARI: MÜQAYİSƏLİ TƏHLİL

R.H. Kərimova

XÜLASƏ

İdiomlar dilin ayrılmaz və mühüm tərkib hissəsidir. Onlar ünsiyyətdə mənaya incəlik, yumor və emosional dərinlik qataraq ifadə imkanlarını zənginləşdirir. Bununla belə, idiomların istifadəsi ünsiyyətin kontekstindən asılı olaraq əhəmiyyətli şəkildə fərqlənir. Rəsmi və qeyri-rəsmi ünsiyyət mühitlərində idiomlara yanaşma fərqli strategiyalar tələb edir. Bu məqalədə idiomların ünsiyyət strategiyalarındakı rolu və funksiyaları təhlil edilir, xüsusilə də onların rəsmi və qeyri-rəsmi kontekstlərdə necə tətbiq olunduğu müqayisəli şəkildə araşdırılır. Rəsmi ünsiyyətdə dəqiqlik və aydınlığın qorunması ön planda olduğu üçün idiomlardan istifadədə ehtiyatlılıq müşahidə olunur, çünki belə ifadələr anlaşılmazlıq riski yarada bilər. Qeyri-rəsmi ünsiyyətdə isə idiomlara daha çox yer verilir və bu, əsasən səmimiyyətin yaradılması, emosiyaların ifadəsi və sosial münasibətlərin qurulmasına xidmət edir. Tədqiqatda həm ədəbi mənbələrə, həm də real ünsiyyət nümunələrinə əsaslanmaqla idiomların hər iki kontekstdə istifadəsinin tezliyi, növləri və təsirləri araşdırılır. Metodoloji baxımdan işdə keyfiyyət və kəmiyyət təhlili yanaşmalarından istifadə olunaraq, idiomların rəsmi və qeyri-rəsmi ünsiyyətdə kommunikativ məqsədlərə çatmaq baxımından effektivliyi müqayisə edilir. Tədqiqatın nəticələri göstərir ki, idiomlar kontekstə uyğun şəkildə tətbiq olunduqda, istər rəsmi, istərsə də qeyri-rəsmi ünsiyyətdə səmərəli kommunikasiya vasitəsi kimi çıxış edə bilər. Bununla belə, onların istifadəsində sosial normalara və auditoriyanın gözləntilərinə xüsusi həssaslıq göstərilməsi vacibdir. Bu məqalədə aparılan təhlillər nəticəsində müəyyən olunur ki, müxtəlif ünsiyyət kontekstlərində idiomların funksiyalarının dərk olunması, effektiv və mədəni cəhətdən adekvat ünsiyyətin qurulmasında mühüm rol oynayır (Gibbs & Berk, 2021).

Açar sözlər: İdiomlar, ünsiyyət strategiyaları, rəsmi ünsiyyət, qeyri-rəsmi ünsiyyət, pragmatika, nitq aktları, mədəni normalar, kontekstual dəyişkənlik

ПРАГМАТИЧЕСКИЕ ФУНКЦИИ ИДИОМ В ФОРМАЛЬНОЙ И НЕФОРМАЛЬНОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ: СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ

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Аннотация

Идиомы являются неотъемлемой и важной частью языка, значительно обогащая коммуникацию за счёт передачи смысловых оттенков, юмора и эмоциональной окраски. Однако их использование существенно варьируется в зависимости от контекста общения. Формальная и неформальная коммуникация предполагают различные подходы к употреблению идиоматических выражений. В данной статье рассматривается роль и прагматические функции идиом в стратегиях общения, с особым акцентом на сравнительный анализ их применения в формальных и неформальных ситуациях. Формальное общение характеризуется стремлением к точности и ясности, что обуславливает осторожное использование идиом во избежание двусмысленности. В то же время, в неформальной коммуникации идиоматические выражения применяются значительно чаще, способствуя установлению доверительной атмосферы, выражению эмоций и формированию межличностных связей. Исследование основано как на литературных источниках, так и на примерах реальной коммуникации, анализируя частотность, типологию и воздействие идиом в различных условиях. Методология исследования сочетает качественные и количественные подходы, что позволяет объективно сравнить эффективность идиом в достижении коммуникативных целей как в формальной, так и в неформальной среде. Результаты анализа показывают, что идиомы при корректном и уместном употреблении представляют собой действенный инструмент повышения эффективности коммуникации в любом контексте. Однако их использование требует учёта социальных норм и ожиданий аудитории. Таким образом, понимание функций идиом в различных контекстах общения представляется необходимым условием для успешного и культурно адекватного взаимодействия (Gibbs & Berk, 2021).

Ключевые слова: идиомы, коммуникативные стратегии, формальная коммуникация, неформальная коммуникация, прагматика, речевые акты, культурные нормы, контекстуальная вариативность

Рәүсә: *fil.ü.f.d., Rəcəb Cəfərli*