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MYTHONYM-BASED IDIOMS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Summary

This article explores mythonym-based idioms in the English language, analyzing their etymological roots and the mythological figures they originate from. Mythonyms, drawn mainly from Greek and Roman mythology, include names of gods, heroes, places, creatures, and symbolic objects that have gained metaphorical meanings in modern usage. Such idioms reflect the deep connection between language, culture, and thought, preserving cultural memory while enriching the expressive power of English. The study also highlights the functional role of mythonyms in idiom creation, showing how they help convey abstract concepts through vivid imagery. Several idioms, including Achilles' heel, Pandora's box, and Herculean task, illustrate the enduring influence of mythology on the English lexicon.

Keywords: mythonym, onomastics, mythology, idioms, linguo-cultural analysis, metaphor

РЕЗЮМЕ

В данной статье рассматриваются идиомы английского языка, основанные на мифонимах, с акцентом на их этимологические корни и мифологических персонажей, от которых они происходят. Мифонимы, главным образом восходящие к греко-римской мифологии, включают имена богов, героев, мест, существ и символических предметов, которые со временем приобрели метафорические значения в современном употреблении. Эти идиомы отражают глубокую взаимосвязь языка, культуры и мышления, сохраняя древнюю культурную память и одновременно обогащая выразительные возможности английского языка. В исследовании подчеркивается не только лингвистическая, но и культурно-когнитивная функция мифонимов в создании идиом, что

позволяет передавать абстрактные понятия более наглядно с помощью мифологических образов. Такие примеры, как *Ахиллесова пята*, *Ящик Пандоры* и *Геркулесов труд*, демонстрируют устойчивое влияние классической мифологии на современный английский язык и дискурс.

Ключевые слова: мифоним, ономастика, мифология, идиомы, лингвокультурный анализ, метафора.

Xülasə

Məqalədə ingilis dilində mitonim əsaslı idiomlar araşdırılır, onların etimoloji mənşəyi və meydana gəldiyi mifoloji obrazlar təhlil olunur. Əsasən yunan və Roma mifologiyasına söykənən mitonimlər zamanla metaforik məna kəsb etmiş tanrı, qəhrəman, məkan, varlıq və simvolik obyekt adlarını əhatə edir. Bu idiomlar dil, mədəniyyət və təfəkkür arasındakı dərin qarşılıqlı əlaqəni göstərir, qədim mədəni yaddaşı qoruyaraq eyni zamanda ingilis dilinin ifadə və metaforik imkanlarını zənginləşdirir. Araşdırmada mitonimlərin yalnız lingvistik deyil, həm də mədəni və idraki funksiyaları vurğulanır, onların abstrakt anlayışların mifoloji obrazlar vasitəsilə daha canlı və anlaşılıqlı şəkildə çatdırılmasına xidmət etdiyi göstərilir. *Axillesin dabanı*, *Pandoranın qutusu* və *Herkulesin işi* kimi nümunələr klassik mifologiyanın müasir ingilis leksikası və diskursuna davamlı təsirini nümayiş etdirir.

Açar sözlər: mitonim, onomastika, mifologiya, idiomlar, lingvokultural təhlil, metafora.

Introduction

Idioms are a central part of the vocabulary of every language, carrying cultural and historical meaning. They often preserve fragments of a nation's collective memory and worldview. In English, idioms based on mythological names – mythonyms – represent a vivid example of the interaction between language and culture. These idioms not only enrich the language with metaphorical depth but also demonstrate how ancient myths continue to shape contemporary thought. Studying them contributes to understanding the historical development of the English lexicon, as well as the cultural transmission of mythological knowledge. Furthermore, idioms illustrate how speakers conceptualize abstract ideas, and mythological idioms in particular create a bridge between modern discourse and ancient narratives. Their usage underscores the significance of symbolism, metaphor, and cultural continuity in linguistic practices.

The Concept of Mythonyms

Mythonymy, a subfield of onomastics, studies names of mythological origin. A mythonym refers to the proper name of a mythological figure, object, or concept. These names originated in the mythological traditions of various civilizations, but Greco-Roman mythology has had the most prominent influence on English idiomatic

expressions. Traditionally, scholars divide mythonyms into several categories:

- 1) Mythological anthroponyms – names of gods, heroes, or legendary humans (Zeus, Athena, Oedipus).
- 2) Mythological toponyms – mythological places (Olympus, Hades, Parnassus).
- 3) Mythological zoonymy – mythological animals and creatures (Pegasus, Cerberus).
- 4) Mythological astronomy – celestial bodies with mythological names (Venus, Mars, Orion).
- 5) Mythological objects – symbolic items (Pandora's Box, Trojan Horse, Midas's Touch).

These categories reveal how mythology permeated all aspects of ancient life. Mythonyms were not only linguistic labels but also symbols of values, fears, and hopes of the societies that created them. In addition, mythonyms frequently crossed linguistic borders, being borrowed and reinterpreted in other cultural contexts. This adaptability explains their survival and ongoing productivity in modern idiomatic usage.

Historical and Cultural Background

The majority of mythonym-based idioms in English originate from Greco-Roman mythology. Their survival in the English language is a result of centuries of literary tradition, translation of classical texts, and Christian education in medieval Europe. Over time, the mythological references detached from their original narratives but retained symbolic meanings. For example, the expression Achilles' heel no longer requires knowledge of Homer's Iliad to be understood; it simply denotes a weakness. This shows how mythological idioms entered everyday language. In the Renaissance period, renewed interest in classical antiquity reinforced the use of mythological names, while modern literature, psychoanalysis, and popular culture have continued to adapt these terms for new contexts. The works of Shakespeare, Milton, and later Romantic poets demonstrate a sustained engagement with mythological imagery, which filtered into idiomatic expressions that persist today. More recently, psychoanalytic theories by Freud and Jung introduced terms like Oedipus complex into the scientific and cultural lexicon, further proving the lasting value of myth-based language.

Examples of Mythonym-Based Idioms

The following idioms illustrate the wide range of mythological references preserved in English. Each idiom has a unique history and metaphorical meaning:

- The Midas Touch – the ability to succeed at any venture, derived from King Midas's gift of turning objects into gold.
- Pandora's Box – a source of unforeseen troubles, from the myth of Pandora.
- Trojan Horse – hidden danger or subversion, from the Greek infiltration of Troy.
- Cupid's Arrow – sudden infatuation or love, from the god of love's weapon.

- Between Scylla and Charybdis – being trapped between two dangers, from Homer’s Odyssey.
- Cadmean Victory – victory at great cost, reflecting the tragic myth of Cadmus.
- To Climb Parnassus – to aspire to poetry and the arts, from the sacred mountain of the Muses.
 - Argus-eyed – extremely watchful, from Argus, the giant with a hundred eyes.
- Lotus-eater – one who indulges in idleness and pleasure, from Homer’s Odyssey.
- Sisyphean task – endless and futile effort, from the punishment of Sisyphus.
- Oedipus Complex – psychoanalytic term based on the myth of Oedipus.
- Achilles’ Heel – a person’s fatal weakness, from the story of Achilles.
- Herculean Task – requiring great strength and effort, from the labors of Hercules.
- Hydra-headed Problem – a problem that multiplies when addressed, from the myth of Hydra.
 - Augean Stables – an extremely difficult or dirty task to clean up, from one of Hercules’ labors.

Additional idioms can also be noted, such as Narcissism (self-love, from the myth of Narcissus), tantalize (from Tantalus), mentor (from Mentor in Homer’s Odyssey), and echo (from the nymph Echo). These examples demonstrate that mythological references have permeated not only idiomatic expressions but also common vocabulary. Their widespread usage illustrates how mythology continues to shape linguistic creativity.

Functional Role in Language and Culture

Mythonym-based idioms enrich the expressive capacity of English. They allow speakers to communicate complex concepts succinctly while evoking vivid cultural imagery. In literature, they function as intertextual references, connecting modern works with classical traditions. In journalism, political discourse, and everyday conversations, these idioms provide stylistic variety and rhetorical strength. For example, describing an economic crisis as a Pandora’s Box instantly conveys the unpredictability and danger of the situation. Similarly, calling an ambitious project a Herculean task signals both admiration and recognition of its difficulty. This shows that idioms are not mere linguistic ornaments but functional tools of communication deeply embedded in culture. They also serve as markers of education and cultural literacy, often distinguishing formal, literary registers from colloquial speech.

Comparative Perspective

While English has inherited many idioms from Greco-Roman antiquity, other languages reflect their own cultural heritage. French and Italian, for instance, share similar mythological idioms due to their direct links to Latin tradition. German also preserves numerous mythological expressions. By contrast, Chinese idioms often stem from Confucian, Daoist, or Buddhist traditions, such as the story-based chengyu expressions. Arabic and Persian idioms tend to draw from Islamic tradition, the

Qur'an, and pre-Islamic legends. This comparison highlights the universality of idioms as a means of preserving cultural memory, even though the mythological frameworks differ. The cross-cultural perspective demonstrates that myth-based idioms are a common human phenomenon, adapted to local traditions.

Conclusion

The study of mythonym-based idioms demonstrates the enduring influence of mythology on language and culture. English idioms derived from mythological names preserve cultural memory, provide vivid metaphorical expressions, and enrich communication across genres. Their analysis highlights the intersection of language, thought, and culture, showing how ancient traditions continue to shape modern linguistic practices. By examining these idioms, one sees how linguistic creativity is bound to cultural continuity. Mythological idioms thus serve as linguistic artifacts, cultural symbols, and rhetorical devices that bridge the past with the present. In addition, the comparative approach suggests that the phenomenon of mythonym-based idioms is universal, though the sources of mythology differ across civilizations. Ultimately, these idioms illustrate the power of stories to transcend time and remain relevant in human communication.

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