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BRITISH IDIOMS THROUGH THE PRISM OF CULTURE

Tomenchuk M. V.

PhD in Philology,

Associate Professor at the Applied Linguistics Department

Uzhhorod National University

Uzhhorod, Ukraine

Idioms constitute a significant component of English vocabulary. Since idioms are closely associated with a specific language and culture, they typically have greater impact than non-idiomatic expressions. According to Alber [1], an idiom is a multiword statement that has become commonplace and is frequently but not always nonliteral. Idioms have a strong connection to the innermost feelings and beliefs of native speakers and reflect their surroundings, life, history, and culture.

Language and culture are closely related. Language is changed and enriched by culture, reflecting its values and traditions, while culture could not exist without language [3, p. 156]. Idioms are comparatively stable verbal idioms that retain fixed meanings and structures and have substantial cultural connotations. Every idiom captures unique aspects of culture, including religion, customs, traditions, and the natural world. These idioms originate in particular historical eras and are transmitted from one generation to the next. Idioms and culture are basically mirrored in the correlation between language and culture. The evolution of British idioms is closely linked to the country's events, cultural influences, and social changes. Conquests, religious views, geographic locations, social conventions, and recreational pursuits are often reflected in idiomatic idioms.

The aim of the research is to explore the origins and evolution of British idioms through their relation to the nation's history, cultural influences, and social customs.

The development of British idioms reflects the linguistic influence of many eras and is intricately linked to historical occurrences, cultural changes, and societal customs. The Roman conquest of Britain in 43 AD, which established Latin as the language of government and law, was one of the first effects. The Roman emphasis on discipline and order endures in idioms that emphasize careful decision-making, even though Latin phrases have mostly disappeared. For example, phrases that emphasize careful decision-making, like "when in doubt, play it safe", tend to reflect the Roman philosophy of order and discipline. In a similar vein, Old English replaced Celtic languages during the Anglo-Saxon migration in the fifth and sixth century, changing the linguistic structure. The legal practice of "trial by ordeal," in which a person's guilt or innocence was determined through physical trials, is reflected in the idiom "walk the plank" [2, p. 221], which symbolizes losing one's job or position. The imagery stems from the fate of those forced off pirate ships, blindfolded and sent into the sea to their doom.

The Viking invasions of the 8th and 9th centuries further enriched the English language, introducing Old Norse words and concepts related to trade, governance, and daily life. The Viking principle of fairness in law is preserved in the idiom "a fair shake" [2, p. 257], meaning to receive just treatment or an equal chance. Another significant linguistic shift occurred after the Norman Conquest of 1066, when French became the language of the ruling elite. This period gave birth to idioms reflecting aristocratic customs, etiquette, and authority. The expression "put on airs" illustrates the social superiority associated with the Norman aristocracy, referring to individuals who adopt pretentious behavior to appear refined. The long-lasting effects of

political discourse on idiomatic expressions are also seen in more recent history. The phrase “on your bike!” [2, p. 24], meaning to take action, became widely known in 1980s Britain after Conservative politician Norman Tebbit urged the unemployed to be proactive in seeking work, referencing his own father’s experience.

Religious influences, particularly from Christianity, were also the source of British idioms. Biblical teachings introduced moral and philosophical expressions, with many phrases rooted in scripture. “Dust and ashes” [2, p. 88], used to convey disappointment or disillusionment, originates from biblical passages such as Genesis 18:27 and the Book of Job 30:19, where it symbolizes worthlessness. This idiom is also linked to the legend of the Sodom apple, which, despite its attractive exterior, crumbles into dust when consumed, serving as a metaphor for shattered expectations.

Britain’s geographical setting and maritime heritage have further influenced idiomatic language. Since the British was a nation historically reliant on seafaring, many idioms take their origin from nautical traditions. The phrase “all hands on deck” refers to the need for collective effort [p. 2, p. 134], originating from sailors being called to duty in emergencies. Weather-related expressions, influenced by Britain’s often unpredictable climate, include “save for a rainy day”, which denotes financial prudence and preparation for difficult times [2, p. 237]. The country’s industrial past also contributed to idiomatic expressions, particularly in mining communities, where labor-intensive work inspired phrases such as “burn the midnight oil” [2, p. 41], originally describing miners working late into the night by the dim light of oil lamps.

British social customs, especially those linked to food, drink, clothing, and currency have enriched the language with idioms that remain widely used. The phrase “not my cup of tea”, which expresses personal preference or distaste [2, p. 68], has emerged from the nation's love of tea. The phrase “earn one's bread and butter”, which refers to making a living [2, p. 37], also reflects the dependence on bread as a food staple. The expression “belt and braces”, which means taking double precautions to ensure safety [2, p. 21], is a reflection of the emphasis on security and caution in British society. The phrase “know how many beans make five”, meaning to be intelligent or perceptive, derives from 19th-century slang, where “bean” referred to a coin, and the idiom implied a sharp understanding of value [2, p. 18].

Sporting traditions and forms of entertainment have also contributed significantly to idiomatic expressions. The phrase “throw in the towel” comes from boxing and denotes giving up [2, p. 291], while “level playing field” represents fairness [2, p. 172], and “a dark horse” describes an unexpected

competitor [2, p. 72]. Similarly, “off your own bat”, meaning to act independently, originates from cricket [2, p. 17]. The idiom “beer and skittles”, denoting amusement, stems from the proverb “life isn’t all beer and skittles,” where skittles, a traditional pub game, symbolizes lighthearted entertainment [2, p. 20].

Idioms in British culture have been further enhanced by literary sources. Many idiomatic expressions from William Shakespeare’s works have permeated everyday speech to such an extent that they no longer refer to his original works. His linguistic inventiveness has had a lasting influence, which is evidenced by the widespread usage of such idioms as “a wild goose chase” (from “Romeo and Juliet”) expressing a hopeless or pointless pursuit of something unattainable [2, p. 313]. The idiom “the world and his wife”, meaning a large crowd, first appeared in Jonathan Swift’s *Polite Conversation* (1738) [2, p. 319]. The idiom “the best of times, the worst of times” comes from the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities* by Ch. Dickens. It denotes the contrasting nature of experiences, often used to describe situations with opposing aspects.

Thus, the evolution of British idioms reveals the spirit of historical events in common language and reflects the nation’s history, geography, and social conventions. Idioms are linguistic markers of Britain’s cultural development, ranging from foreign invasions to religious influences, maritime customs, and literature.

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