A Linguistic Analysis of Ten Idioms
Tour Guide Use

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Abstract

A tour guide is a person who does a verbal action that is to
guide visitors in the language of their choice. He provides
assistance and information to people on organized tours. This task
allows him/her to use a specialized language with a large portion of
texts that is made up of a variety of multi-word units (MWUs). One
type of MWU is idioms.

It is hypothesized that idioms used by a tour guide
correspond with the type of job he /she doing, i.e. they have the
function of informing and advising with ideational references to the
outside world.

The aim of this paper is to examine a number of idioms that a tour
guide uses in his/her work , focusing primarily on the functions,
structures  and types of those idiom.
The word idiom is originated in 1565-70 and comes from the Latin word idioma with the meaning to make one's own. It has suffered different labels for instance: Carter (1998) uses the term fixed expressions, Moon (1997) picks up the term multi-word items, Howarth (1998) prompts for the term phraseology, whereas McCarthy (1998) prefers the traditional term idiom and Glaser (1984) the term phraseological unit. 

The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics regards an idiom as “an expression which function as a single unit and whose meaning cannot be worked out from its separate parts” (1992: 198)

Three years later, Jonathan Crowther in the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English (Oxford University Press - 1995) defines idiom as “a phrase or sentence whose meaning is not clear from the meaning of its individual words and which must be learnt as a whole unit.” (1990: 27)
Other researchers present contrasting views of the concept of idiomaticity. These views do not necessarily contradict each other; rather, they may complement each other to create a broad perspective on idioms as seen in the following table:

### Table (1) Different Definitions of Idiom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Author</th>
<th>The Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McMordie, W; 1983: 4</td>
<td>An idiom is a number of words which, taken together, mean something different from the individual words of the idiom when they stand alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gazder et al (1985: 327)</td>
<td>Traditional wisdom dictates that an idiom is by definition is a constituent or series of constituents where interpretations is not a compositional function of the interpretations of its parts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker; 1992: 63</td>
<td>Frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and often carry meanings which cannot be deduced from their individual components.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean Curry; 1994: 49</td>
<td>An idiom is the assigning of a new meaning to a group of words which already have their own meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatch and Brown; 1995: 202</td>
<td>The set end of the continuum from loose to set collocation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moon; 1998: 3</td>
<td>An ambiguous term, used in conflicting ways. In lay or general use, idiom has two main meanings. First, idiom is a particular means of expressing something in language, music, art, and so on, which characterizes a person or group. Secondly (and much less commonly in English), an idiom is a particular lexical collocation or phrasal lexeme, peculiar to a language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collins (٠٠٠٢: ٧٠) 

Idioms as a group of words, which have a different meaning when used together from the one it would have if the meaning of each word were taken individually and that are usually employed in everyday language to precisely express ideas and concepts that cannot be compressed into a single word.

Schmitt (٠٠٠٢: ٣٠)،

Idioms tend to be among the most fixed of multiword units and are, in essence, often colloquial metaphors — terms which require some foundational knowledge, information, or experience, to use only within a culture where parties must have common reference.

It could be seen that there is no conflict between the aforementioned definitions of idiom, i.e. regardless of obvious differences in expressing; they intersect at one point that is an idiom is a fixed expression whose meaning cannot be worked out by combining the literal meaning of its individual words.

Mona Baker (٢٩٩١: ٣٦) excludes five things that normally cannot be done to an idiom as it will lose its sense and they are as follows:

1. An idiom tends to have some measure of internal cohesion such that it can often be replaced by a literal counterpart that is made up of a single word.

Example:

a. have a bee in one’s bonnet
b. He has bees in his bonnet.
1. It can often be inflected in the same way individual words in a phrase can be inflected. This inflection usually follows the same pattern of inflection as the idiom's literal counterpart.
Example:

2. It resists interruptions by other words whether they are semantically compatible or not
Example:
   a. pull one's leg
   b. *pull hard on one's leg
   c. *pull on one's left leg

3. It resists the reordering of its component parts
Example
   a. Let the cat out of the bag
   b. The cat got out of the bag

4. An idiom has a non-productive syntactic structure. Only single particular lexemes can allocate in an idiomatic construction. Substituting other words from the same generic lexical relations set will destroy the idiomatic meaning of the expression
Example:
   a. Eat one's words
   b. Eat one's sentences
   c. Swallow one's words

1.1. The Structure of Idioms
An idiom can have a regular structure, an irregular, or even a grammatically incorrect structure. McMordie (1983:89). A native speaker is not consciously aware of this inconsistency when in spite of the irregular form, the meaning is always clear. Sometimes there
is a regular form but the meaning is not clear and sometimes both meaning and forms are irregular. Inflection in idioms is not a strong tradition in most languages but inflect they do, though in a very restricted manner. Most idioms are unique and fixed in their grammatical structure. Idioms may be adjectival, adverbial, verbal, or nominal. Fernando (١٩٩٤: ٣٢٢) suggests six different types of combination are given:

**Pairs of Adjectives**: English has many phrases which contain two adjectives joint together by and, but, and or. However, the order of adjectives must not be changed, as it is fixed by usage, e.g., free and easy, rich and poor, right and wrong, short and sweet, black and blue, etc.

**Pairs of Nouns**: There are a number of nouns in English which always occur together and have a fixed order. It is not easy to explain why one noun always comes first and not the other. Long usage has established the order, which it must not be changed; the following list shows some of the most frequent pairs:

The beginning and the end, the first and the last, body and soul, Flesh and blood, etc.

**Collective Noun and Phrases**: There are several nouns which and idiomatically used when describing collections of certain things. These nouns are called collective nouns. Deciding which is the usual way of describing many sheep or cows in English. The following are examples of conventional collective nouns phrases: a flight of birds, a group of people (i.e. not so many), and a bunch of flowers.

**Compound Adjectives**: Sometimes in English we find adjectives that are made up of a few wards, these are particularly popular in C·lloquial English and in newspapers. The meaning in most cases is quite clear. These adjectives are always made up of hyphenated words. Here are some examples in current use:-
a nine-to-five job, a run-of-the-mill job

**Adjective Noun Phrases**:- Those are idiomatic phrases that many cause difficulty to the learner because of their special meaning, which is independent of context. English is full of phrases of the kind of dark horse, an early bird, French leave, consisting of an adjective and a noun.

an open question, a package tour, a raining day

**Noun Phrases**:- They are a combination of nouns the following are some of these combinations like a bed of roses, a bed of thorns, a bag of bones

### 1. Types of Idioms:

Moon (1998:4) claims, that idiom denotes a general term for many kinds of multi-word expressions ‚whether semantically opaque or not’. To understand it better it is necessary to look at the typology that is proposed by Fernando (1994:30) who distinguishes three sub-classes of idioms:

1. **Pure Idioms.** Fernando defines pure idiom as ‚a type of conventionalized, non literal multiword expression’ (ibid.:108). Pure idioms are always non literal, however they may be either invariable or may have little variation. In addition, idioms are said to be opaque (ibid.:107). For example, pure idiom to spill the beans has nothing to do with the beans.

2. **Semi-Idioms.** Semi-idioms are said to have one or more literal constituents and one with non literal sub sense. Therefore, this type of idioms is considered partially opaque (ibid.:107). For example, foot the bill which means ‚pay’ is semi-idiom.

3. **Literal Idioms.** This sub-class of idioms are either invariable or allow
Little variation. In addition, literal idioms are considered to be transparent as they can be interpreted on the basis of their parts. For example, of course, in any case, for certain.

1.1.4 The Functions of Idioms

Newmark (1988:401) claims that idiom has two main functions: pragmatic and referential. The first function is called cognitive, while the other is aesthetic. The pragmatic function is to appeal to the senses, to interest, to surprise, to delight, i.e. It may convey thanks, apologies, advices, warnings, agreements, etc. The referential function, on the other hand ‘describe a mental process or state, a concept, a person, an object, a quality or an action more comprehensively and concisely than is possible in literal or physical language’ (ibid.)

Fernando (1994:74-214), sub classified three more functions of the referential one that are performed by idioms: ideational, interpersonal and relational.

Idioms that have ideational function denote content which includes action (pull an invisible string), situation (to be under the thumb of one’s family), people and things (made rather a fool of myself).

The second function is interpersonal that fulfills interactional function through apologies (I beg your pardon), greetings (good evening), directives (to put it straight), etc.

Finally, idioms with relational function are used to ensure cohesion and coherence of discourse. These are idioms that integrate information (on the one hand...on the other hand, in addition) and that sequence the information (in the first/second place).
The Data for the Analysis

The researcher has chosen ten most common idioms used by a tour guide found on the website English Club .com /Tourism &language\1 · Idioms Tour Guides Use. The analysis of each idiom will tackle the followings:

1. The Figurative Meaning
2. The Contextual Situation,
3. The Functions
4. The Type
5. The Structure

Analysis of the Data

1. A Full Plate:
   The Figurative Meaning:
   A full schedule; no free time
   The Contextual Situation
   We have a full plate tomorrow, so get a good rest tonight.
   The Pragmatic Function: informing
   The Extension: I hereby inform you that we have a full plate
   The Referential Function: Ideational
   The Structure of the Idiom: pairs of nouns (N+N)
   The Type of Idiom: Pure

2. Bright and Early:
   The Figurative Meaning:
   Very early in the morning
   The Contextual Situation
   We’ll need to leave bright and early to catch the first ferry.
   Pragmatic Function: informing
   The Extension: I hereby inform you to leave bright and early
   The Referential Function: Ideational
The Structure of the Idiom: pairs of adjectives (Adj+Adj)
The Type of Idiom: Semi

1. Call It a Day:
The Figurative Meaning:
Finish an activity or tour; go home or back to the hotel
The Contextual Situation:
You all look tired. Let’s call it a day.
The Pragmatic Function: Informing
The Extension: I hereby suggest you call it a day
The Referential Function: Ideational
The Structure of the Idiom: Verbal (V+N+N)
The Type of Idiom: pure

2. Get a move on:
The Figurative Meaning:
Go more quickly
The Contextual Situation:
We’ll need to get a move on if we want to catch the four o’clock bus.
The Pragmatic Function: Advising
The Extension: I hereby advise you to get a move on
The Referential Function: Ideational
The Structure of the Idiom: Verbal (V+N+prep)
The Type of the Idiom: Pure

3. Hang Tight:
The Figurative Meaning:
Wait patiently for a moment
The Contextual Situation:
Please hang tight until the driver returns.
The Pragmatic Function: Advising
The Extension: I hereby advise you to hang tight
The Referential Function : Ideational
The Structure of the Idiom: Verbal (V+Adj)
The Type of the Idiom: Pure

¹. Hit the Road:
The Figurative Meaning:
Depart: Travel: Begin a tour.
The Contextual Situation:
We’ll hit the road as soon as the bus driver arrives.
The Pragmatic Function : Informing
The extension: I hereby inform that we’ll hit the road when the bus driver arrives.
The Referential Function : Ideational
The Structure of the Idiom: Verbal (V+N)
The Type of the Idiom: pure

². If worse comes to worst:
The Figurative Meaning:
Introduces the action to take when no other option is successful.
The Contextual Situation:
If worse comes to worst, call the police.
The Pragmatic Function : Advising
I hereby advise you to if worse comes to worse, take an action
The Referential Function : Ideational
The Structure of the Idiom: Con+N+ V+Prep+N (conditional clause)
The Type of the Idiom: Semi

³. Off Track:
The Figurative Meaning:
Wrong way; away from the main road or route
The Contextual Situation:
Don’t go off track. There are some dangerous areas in this city.
The Pragmatic Function: Warning
The Extension: I hereby warn not to off track

The Referential Function: Ideational
The Structure of the Idiom: prep+N
The Type of the Idiom: Semi

1. Travel light:
The Figurative Meaning:
Take little baggage: Don’t pack a lot of items. Bring only what you need.
The Contextual Situation:
I can be ready in half an hour; I always travel light,

The Pragmatic Function: Advising
The Extension: I hereby advise you to travel light

The Referential Function: Ideational
The Structure of the Idiom: V+Adj
The Type of the Idiom: Pure

11. Watch Your Back:
The Figurative Meaning:
"Watch your back" means "Look out for what might be behind you."
The Contextual Situation:
Keep your wallet in a safe place and watch your back on the subway.

The Pragmatic Function: Warning
The Extension: I hereby warn you to watch your back

The Referential Function: Ideational
The Structure of the Idiom: V+N
The Type of the Idiom: Pure
1.4 Results and Conclusions

Making a breakdown table for the analysis of the data shown hereunder.

Table(1) A breakdown Table of the analysis of the idioms Tour Guide use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO</th>
<th>The idiom</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Structure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A full plate</td>
<td>Pure</td>
<td>Informing -Ideational</td>
<td>N+N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bright and Early</td>
<td>Semi</td>
<td>Informing –Ideational</td>
<td>Adj+Adj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Call it a day</td>
<td>Pure</td>
<td>Informing -Ideational</td>
<td>V+N+N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Get a move on</td>
<td>Pure</td>
<td>Advising –Ideational</td>
<td>V+Det+N+Prep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Hang Tight</td>
<td>Pure</td>
<td>Advising –Ideational</td>
<td>V+Adj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Hit the Road</td>
<td>Pure</td>
<td>Informing-Ideational</td>
<td>V+Det+N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>If worse comes to worst</td>
<td>Semi</td>
<td>Advising -Ideational</td>
<td>Con+Adj+V+Prep+Adj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Off track</td>
<td>Semi</td>
<td>Warning-Ideational</td>
<td>Prep+N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Travel Light</td>
<td>Pure</td>
<td>Advising -Ideational</td>
<td>V+Adj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Watch your Back</td>
<td>Pure</td>
<td>Warning-Ideational</td>
<td>V+P+N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following results have been reached:

1. The pragmatic function of the idioms used by the tour guide is confined to three types: Informing, Advising and Warning. Both the informing and the advising functions make 40% of the total number of the functions whereas the warning one constitute 20%.
The type of the referential function with ideational task holds the percentage 100%. The idiom with verbal structure is the most common one used in the tour guide idioms. It constitutes 50% of the total number; other types are used variably. The pure idioms present 7% percent of the types of idioms used in the data whereas the semi ones constitute of 3% and there is no evidence of the literal type.

It may be concluded that: since idiom is a fixed expression whose meaning cannot be taken as a combination of the meanings of its component parts, idioms are not literal expressions but figurative ones and, idioms used by tour guide are no exceptions. A tour guide leads visitors through points of interest and provides useful and interesting information so, his main job is to inform, advise and may sometimes warn. Therefore idioms with informing, advising and warning functions with verbal structure are considered pioneers in a tour guide speech. The job of a tour guide should have no interpersonal or relational language with the visitors. Thus, idioms with ideational function dominates his speech for they refer to the conceptualizing process involved in mental activities, i.e. they make us able to understand what happens around us and this is the main purpose of participants in a tour.
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