

Essential English Idioms for Business Communication



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سرشناسه:

روغنی، علی، ۱۳۴۸ -

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عنوان و نام پدیدآور:

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مشخصات نشر:

تهران: ناظری، ۱۳۹۳ - ۱۴۰۱ م.

مشخصات ظاهری:

۳۵۰ ص

شابک:

۳۵۰۰۰۰ ریال: ۶-۴۳-۶۰۳۲-۶۰۰-۹۷۸

وضعیت فهرست نویسی:

فیا

یادداشت:

انگلیسی.

اوانویسی عنوان:

اسنشیال ...

موضوع:

کسب و کار - اصطلاح ها و تعبیرها

موضوع:

زبان انگلیسی - اصطلاح ها و تعبیرها

رده بندی کنگره:

۳۹۲/۰۸۰۲۴۴ / ۱۳۹۳۵۱۰

رده بندی دیویی:

۳۸۰/۰۳

شماره کتابشناسی ملی:

۲۶۶۱۲۲۴

تاریخ درخواست:

۱۳۹۳/۰۸/۲۷

تاریخ پاسخگویی:

۱۳۹۳/۰۸/۲۹

کد پیگیری:

۳۶۶۰۴۷۶



ناظری انتشارات

مؤلفین: علی روغنی

حروفنگاری: آناهیتا هادیپور تیکتراش

چاپخانه: آپل

لیتوگرافی: آپل

صحافی: آپل

نوبت چاپ: چاپ اول: ۱۳۹۳

شمارگان: ۱۰۰۰

قیمت: ۳۵۰۰۰ تومان

شماره استاندارد بین المللی کتاب (شابک)

International Standard Book Number (ISBN) 978-600-6032-43-6

حق چاپ برای ناشر محفوظ است

Introduction

Idioms share cultural and historical information and broaden people's understanding and manipulation of a language. Among the various definitions of idioms are:

- (1) The language peculiar to a people, country, class, community or more rarely an individual.
- (2) A construction or expression having a meaning different from the literal one or not according to the usual patterns of the language (New Webster's Dictionary, 1993).

Idioms include all the expressions we use that are unique to English, including clichés and slang. Prepositional usage is also a common part of idiomatic expressions (Princeton Review, 1998), but this paper addresses idioms as used in figurative language.

The following sentence contains two idioms: Carol's father was going to see red is she failed tomorrow's exam. She was burning the midnight oil because she had not been taking her schoolwork seriously.

These idioms can be explained as:

to see red-to become very angry;

burning the midnight oil-staying up late at night studying or working.

Speakers who are not sure of what these phrases mean can use contextual clues to understand these idiomatic expressions, but they are part of the average native speakers' vocabulary. Accordingly, they should also be part of second-language learners' (L2) vocabulary.

Not every idiom will be learned, but as people become more comfortable with English and are exposed to a greater amount of native English language, depending on

their interests, they will be encounter a larger number of idioms.

Idioms are pervasive. They are used in formal and informal speech, conversation and writing and are part of standard speech in business, education and the media.

L2 learners are expected to understand a variety of common idioms, which is advantageous for those planning to work in a world that increasingly uses English as the language of communication and commerce.

Whether it is working in one's native country or in an English-speaking country, idioms are important as part of the shared knowledge among English speakers.

While idioms are commonly used for official business, a distinction must be made about slang. Slang is "currently widely used and understood language, consisting of new meanings attributed to existing words or of wholly new words, generally accepted as lying outside standard polite usage. It usually passes out of usage in time or is accepted into standard usage" (New Webster's, 1993).

Referring to someone's apartment as his or her "crib" is slang, and "crib" is a word now out of style.

The phrase, subtleties of the language, best describe a general area into which idioms can be categorized. They transmit certain information about the speaker that might not be obvious.

Students of English who effectively communicate with idioms show a certain understanding of the language. They understand and communicate on a deeper level of the language.

The word "subtle" is not as one of its definition where something is hard to grasp or difficult to define but in a more expansive way.

The wider meaning consists of a definition where lexical usage shows a deeper understanding of the target language and culture.

Since vocabulary and culture are intertwined, L2 speakers can gain more vocabulary through idioms and conversely, can learn more about idioms from being exposed to the target culture. The more comprehensible input there is the more learners' listening, speaking, writing and reading skills will improve.

In American English, there are many idioms about sports: baseball, American football, golf and basketball. For people who do not understand American baseball, the expression, "He struck out," may have little or no meaning. Native speakers will know this is a reference to someone who was unsuccessful in achieving a desired goal.

Ideally, vocabulary should not be learned in a vacuum, and this is especially true for idioms. There are varieties of idiom dictionaries for those who wish to learn more about idioms. Newspapers and magazines, radio programs, television shows and films also sources of idioms.

Roleplaying, writing and interactive activities such as matching the parts of idioms are some activities that can help L2 expand their knowledge and use of idioms.

Knowing which idiom should be used when comes with practice and time. "If you keep an open mind and play your cards right, your proficiency in English will soon be something to crow about" (Lafin, 1996).

Each language has its own Expressions. They are relatively easy for nonnative speakers to learn and use, if the concept of them is understood. Expressions are integral part of the English language.

This reference book is designed as a guide for English language learners. Any Individual speaker of a language has a more comprehensive unconscious knowledge of how Expressions work than any linguist has yet been able to describe.

The English language has more than 1,000,000 words and is one of the most flexible languages in the world. It's a living language, like those other languages we use today.

Understanding the lexicon of English demands more than knowing the denotative meaning of words. It requires its speakers to have connotative word comprehension and more, an understanding of figurative language. Idioms fall into this final category.

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