

Functional Specificities of Person-Component Idiomatic Expressions in The English Language

Toshtemirova Zulfiya Toshtemirovna

Master student, Faculty of Foreign Languages of Institute of Pedagogy, Belgorod State National Research University, Russia

Aleksei Anatolievitch Kolesnikov

Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor, Department of Foreign Languages, Belgorod State National Research University, Belgorod, Russia

Received: 14 March 2025; **Accepted:** 10 April 2025; **Published:** 12 May 2025

Abstract: This study explores the functional characteristics of idiomatic expressions in the English language that contain a person-related component, such as “man”, “person”, or “fellow”. Using a qualitative, descriptive method, a selected set of idioms was analyzed from major dictionaries and corpora for their semantic structure, pragmatic function, and thematic roles. The findings show that person-component idioms serve evaluative, descriptive, and cultural functions, often reflecting societal values, stereotypes, and behavioral norms. Through contextual examples and categorization, the study demonstrates how these idioms contribute to effective communication and cultural understanding in English discourse.

Keywords: Idiomatic expressions, person-component, semantics, pragmatics, English language, phraseology, cultural connotation.

Introduction: Idiomatic expressions serve as one of the most vivid and expressive elements of any language, offering insight into its speakers' cultural identity, cognitive patterns, and communicative values. In the English language, a specific group of idioms contains a “person-component” — that is, a word referring to a human figure (e.g., man, woman, guy, person, fellow, etc.) — which adds an anthropocentric dimension to the meaning of the phrase. Expressions such as “a man of his word,” “the average Joe,” or “to be one’s own worst enemy” not only enrich everyday communication but also reflect social norms, stereotypes, and evaluative judgments rooted in English-speaking cultures.

The study of idioms with a person-component is important for several reasons. First, these expressions often carry meanings that go beyond the literal interpretation of their words, making them challenging for language learners. Second, they are heavily influenced by sociolinguistic factors, such as gender

roles, individualism, and cultural archetypes. Finally, their proper usage requires not only linguistic competence but also pragmatic awareness — understanding when, how, and to whom such expressions can be appropriately used.

Despite the broad interest in idiomatic expressions in general, idioms with person components have not been sufficiently isolated as a distinct category for in-depth linguistic and functional analysis. This paper attempts to fill that gap by exploring the semantic, pragmatic, and structural features of English idiomatic expressions that contain explicit references to persons. The research aims to identify their core functions, thematic variations, and communicative roles in both spoken and written discourse. In doing so, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how language encodes cultural and interpersonal meanings through idiomatic structures.

METHODS

To investigate the functional features of English

idiomatic expressions that contain a person-component, this study adopted a descriptive and analytical approach rooted in phraseological and semantic analysis. As a student researcher, I focused on identifying, classifying, and interpreting idioms that include words like "man," "woman," "person," "guy," "fellow," or other human-related elements.

The primary data for this study was collected from reputable phraseological dictionaries such as Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, Cambridge Idioms Dictionary, and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. Additionally, authentic examples were drawn from English-language corpora and online sources such as the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), British National Corpus (BNC), and selected literary and media texts.

A selected group of idiomatic expressions was carefully examined for inclusion in the study. The selection focused on expressions that clearly referenced human figures and met specific criteria. First, each idiom had to include a person-related word, such as "man," "nobody," or "gentleman." Second, the expression needed to carry a figurative meaning that could not be directly understood from its literal components. Finally, only those idioms that appeared frequently in

contemporary spoken or written English were chosen, ensuring that the analysis reflected language used in real-world communication.

Each idiom was examined for its semantic structure, figurative meaning, context of usage, and pragmatic function. The idioms were then grouped according to their communicative roles (e.g., evaluative, descriptive, humorous) and thematic categories (e.g., character traits, behavior, social roles).

This qualitative approach allowed for a deeper understanding of how person-component idioms function beyond literal language and how they reflect broader cultural and communicative tendencies in English discourse.

RESULTS

The analysis revealed that person-component idioms serve a variety of communicative functions in English. Many of them are evaluative in nature, used to express judgment about a person's reliability, character, or behavior. Others highlight social roles, cultural archetypes, or common personality traits. Below is a table illustrating several idiomatic expressions with person components, their meanings, and usage:

| Idiom | Literal Meaning | Figurative Meaning | Function | Example |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|--|---------------|---|
| a man of his word | A man who keeps promises | Someone reliable and trustworthy | Evaluative | "You can trust him; he's a man of his word" |
| the average Joe | A typical man | An ordinary person representing the general public | Descriptive | "The product is aimed at the average Joe" |
| one's own worst enemy | Self as an obstacle | A person whose actions work against their own good | Psychological | "She's often her own worst enemy at work" |
| every man | Each person | No | Social | "When the |

| Idiom | Literal Meaning | Figurative Meaning | Function | Example |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--|------------------|--|
| for himself | for themselves | cooperation; each person acts independently | commentary | fire alarm rang, it was every man for himself” |
| the man in the street | Unknown passerby | Represents the opinion of the general public | Representational | “What does the man in the street think about this?” |

These examples demonstrate how idioms reflect cultural views about individuals and society. The presence of a human-related component often makes these expressions more relatable and impactful in everyday conversation.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the multidimensional role of person-component idiomatic expressions in English. These idioms are not only linguistically rich but also culturally loaded, often encapsulating values, stereotypes, and societal attitudes. For instance, idioms like “a man of his word” uphold reliability and integrity, suggesting that such traits are socially desirable. On the other hand, expressions like “one’s own worst enemy” illustrate internal conflict, a theme commonly explored in both personal reflection and public discourse.

From a pragmatic perspective, person-based idioms serve important functions in everyday communication. They provide speakers with compact, expressive tools to convey complex ideas, judgments, or observations about people and behavior. This makes them especially effective in spoken language, journalism, literature, and advertising. Their frequent appearance in informal contexts also shows how embedded they are in native speaker intuition.

Furthermore, these idioms often mirror cultural norms regarding gender roles and individualism. Phrases like “the average Joe” emphasize conformity and relatability, while others such as “every man for himself” highlight competitive or survivalist mindsets. Such expressions not only depict common social perceptions but also contribute to reinforcing them

through repetition and familiarity.

The categorization of idioms into functions such as evaluative, descriptive, and representational enables a clearer understanding of their communicative purpose. This insight can benefit both linguists and language learners by improving idiom acquisition and enhancing cultural literacy. It also reveals the interconnectedness of language, culture, and cognition, demonstrating how idioms can act as windows into societal values and interpersonal dynamics.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, idiomatic expressions that include a person-component hold significant value in the English language due to their expressive and culturally reflective nature. This study has shown that such idioms go beyond their surface meanings and serve specific communicative roles—whether to evaluate, describe, or represent individuals and social behavior. Their ability to encapsulate complex social and psychological concepts in a concise and relatable manner makes them indispensable in both formal and informal discourse.

For language learners and researchers alike, understanding these idioms is essential not only for linguistic proficiency but also for developing cultural insight. Recognizing the themes and functions of person-component idioms contributes to deeper language awareness and more effective communication. Further research could expand the dataset across other languages for comparative studies or explore their evolution in modern usage, particularly in media and digital communication.

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