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## IDIOMS WITH NUMBERS IN MODERN ENGLISH

**Summary.** Almost any language is rich in idioms and an individual with only a superficial knowledge of these lexical units will find themselves at a serious disadvantage in discussions, debates, or casual conversations.

An idiom is a number of words which, taken together, mean something different from the individual words of the idiom when they stand alone. The way in which the words are put together is often odd, illogical or even grammatically incorrect.

Idioms take many different forms or structures. They can be very short or rather long. A large number of idioms consist of some combination of noun and adjective.

Another important characteristic of idiom is their use that is absolutely optional paralleling derivational vocabulary. One can choose either to use or to omit them. Since the use of idioms is not obligatory and their structure is complex, they tend to remain special objects in the language.

An idiom can have a regular structure, an irregular or even grammatically incorrect structure. Other idioms are completely regular and logical in their grammar and vocabulary. Because of the special features of some idioms, we have to learn the idiom as a whole and we often cannot change any part of it (except perhaps, only the tense of the verb. The idiom has been fixed by long usage – as is sometimes seen from the vocabulary.

**Key words:** idiom, number, structure, expression, meaning, speech.

**Formulation of the scientific problem.** 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 the latter category. Learning idioms is certainly not a piece of cake (very easy), but once you know them, they can be a lot of fun, and anyway, because English people use idioms non-stop you will be all at sea (totally confused) in most conversations until you learn the ropes (understand how things work).

**Analysis of the latest investigations of the question.** A major stimulus to intensive studies of phraseology in linguistics was N. Rayevskaya's research carried out relating to cast-iron idioms or phraseological fusions in the English language.

Investigations of the phraseology in the English language were initiated by famous scientists A. Kunin, K. Barantsev, Dr. Elizabeth Bartsch-Parker, S. Burgen whose dictionaries of English idioms have much valuable information on their meaning and use in different nation's communication.

A special point of interest is observed by the approach to the problem of phraseology suggested by a famous philologist N. Amosova who defines phraseological units as units of fixed context, that is, phrases with a specific and stable sequence of certain lexical components and peculiar semantic relations between them. In these terms, phraseological units are classified into phrasemes and idioms.

**The aim of the article is:**

1. To describe general peculiarities of idioms;
2. To define the classification of idioms;

3. To show the role of idioms in English language learning;
4. To provide the basic characteristics of idioms with number;
5. To analyze the usage of idioms with number in modern English.

**Presentation of the basic material and interpretation of the results of the investigation.** Idioms are often used in all types of languages, colloquial and formal, spoken and written; they are a part of business English, education and the media. It is necessary to consider the origin of the most widely used idioms [1, p. 86].

Let us consider the importance of idioms in the learning process from the view point of future prospects for the learners. Nowadays young people have many opportunities to take part in various students' exchange programs, undertake a traineeship in the English-speaking countries and even make a successful career abroad. So they should possess good communication skills to avoid misunderstandings and a language barrier. But in the reality, most of the people who have already had experience of studying and working abroad, confirm that they have faced some serious problems in communicating with native speakers due to idioms. The truth is that they did not simply understand the meaning of unknown idioms which were widely used by native speakers in their everyday speech.

To begin with, there are a lot of relevant dictionaries which provide the learners with various often-used idioms. Then, idioms can be learned through the films, sports and news programs, by means of modern Internet technologies. And, the learners can acquire idioms in the English language lessons using different activities such as dialogues and role plays. Let us consider them in more details. The appropriate dialogues can provide the learners with the situations to practice ordinary routine conversation so the students have good practice with principal communication skills in context.

The data on English idioms was collected from the following sources: Dictionary of Idioms, The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, Longman Idioms Dictionary, and Idioms Organiser: Organised by metaphor, topic and key word. 106 randomly chosen English idioms were analyzed. There were distinguished 12 idioms which include 2 numbers at once. Such idioms are called mixed type number idioms in the analysis [see 2; 3; 4].

According to Figure 1, the most frequent numbers used in the English idioms are the numbers one (70 instances) and two (47 instances). These numbers do not bear any symbolic meaning in the English culture. However, the most symbolic number seven is one of the least common numbers in the idioms (3 instances). Other numbers which can be distinguished as not productive in the English idioms are the numbers six (6 instances), eight (1 instance), and ten (6 instances).

The number one is going to be presented first. Most of the English idioms containing the number one (or first) may be used in the general sense of something or somebody superior to all the others. The above mentioned meaning can embrace other meanings, such as: the most important, notorious, excellent, and of the highest

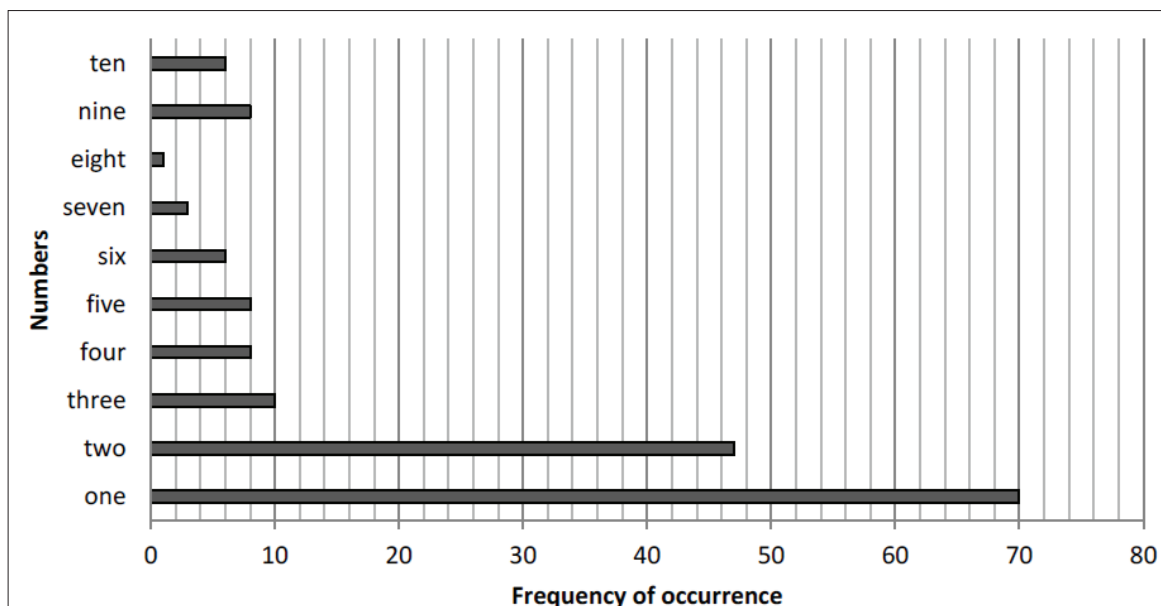


Fig. 1. The frequency of occurrence of numbers in English idioms

quality. These meanings might be distinguished in the idioms: *public enemy number one*, *one-horse race*, *go one better than*, *put one over on somebody*, *be/get one up on somebody* (*get one over on somebody*), *first among equals*, *first past the post*, *of the first order* (*or magnitude*), *of the first water* [4, p. 345].

Moreover, the majority of the English idioms which include the number *one* tend to be used to speak about drinking alcohol or drunk people, for example, *down in one*, *have had one too many*, *one for the road*, *one over the eight*. As was mentioned before, sometimes idioms might include two numbers at once, as in the case of *one over the eight*. The idiom *one over the eight* is used to describe a *slightly drunk person*. The idea behind this idiom is that a drinker can reasonably be expected to consume eight glasses of beer without becoming drunk. The expression was originally UK armed forces' slang from the early 20th century. Also, *one* can be used in the sense of being the same, for instance, *one and the same*. In addition, the number *one* (*or first*) in the English idioms might refer to first of all or before anything else, as in the examples: *first thing early in the morning and first things first*. Finally, idioms containing the number *one* can be used to describe personal qualities, for instance, *(all) rolled into one* (speaking about characteristics drawn from different people or things combined in one person or thing), *take care of* (*or look after*) *number one* (having the sense of being selfishly absorbed in protecting your own person and interests), and there is *one born every minute* (something that you say about someone who you think has been very stupid) [2, p. 169].

One of the meanings of the number *two*, the destruction of unity, can be related to the fact that two may symbolize any contradiction. The analyzed idioms show that the number *two* might be used in the sense of two (usually opposite) ways of action (situation) or two effects of the action (situation). For example, the idiom *a two-edged sword* communicates the meaning of a course of action or situation having both positive and negative effects; the idiom *two-way street* describes a situation or relationship between two people or groups in which action is required from both parties; something that works both ways; the expression *two sides of the same coin* is used in order to say that two problems or situations are so closely related that they are really just two parts of the same thing; and the idiom – *two sides of a shield* means two ways of looking at something, two sides to a question.

Moreover, the number *two* may convey the meaning of drawing an obvious or incorrect conclusion from what is known or evident. The examples of idioms having this meaning are: *put two and two together* and *put two and two together and make five*. In the second mixed idiom the number five represents incorrect conclusion because as all the people know if we put two and two together, it will make four, but not five [2, p. 245].

The number two is used in the idioms to refer to a stupid or crazy person, for example, *thick as two* (short) planks and *two sandwiches short of a picnic*. The number two may also express the meaning of similarity between two things, people or people's opinions, for instance, the idiom that makes two of us has the sense of being in the same position or hold the same opinion as the previous speaker, and the idiom like two peas in a pod (also as alike as two peas) used about two people or things that are exactly like each other. In addition, the same as the number one, the number two is used in the idiom referring to drinking alcohol. The old-fashioned idiom two (or three) sheets to (or in) the wind means to be drunk [4, p. 276].

For instance, the idiom *kill two birds with one stone* conveys the meaning of achieving two aims at once. The idiom *two's company*, *three's a crowd* means that two is enough; it said when two people are relaxed and enjoying each other's company but another person would make them feel less comfortable.

There is not any tendency for the number three to reveal a particular meaning in the English idioms. Although, it can be pointed out that the number three holds positive associations more frequently than negative ones. 10 idioms containing the number three were analyzed [5, p. 147].

The positive connotation can be attached to the number three in the idiom *three musketeers*, where it means three close associates or inseparable friends. This number can also communicate the positive meaning of the third attempt which should be successful, as in the idiom: *third time lucky*. One more idiom expressing the positive meaning is *three cheers for*; it implies three successive hurrahs expressing appreciation or congratulation of someone or something. In this idiom the number three is used in its original meaning of counting things. Similarly, the number three is connected with counting in the idiom *the big Three*; it conveys the meaning of the dominant group of three [6, p. 188].

The number four is also not frequently used in the English idioms. There were found 8 idioms with the number four. The idioms to the four winds, be scattered to the four winds and the four (or far) corners of the world (or earth) have similar meaning of all four directions; the first idiom communicates the meanings: in all four directions and so as to be abandoned or neglected; the second idiom means to be broken up and lost, or spread over a wide area (in the two mentioned examples four is associated with omnipresent wind, which cannot be seen); and the third expression conveys the meaning of remote regions of the earth, far away from each other. The idiom the fourth estate is closely related to the British culture. It refers to the press or the profession of journalism. The idiom the big Four has almost the same meaning as the idiom the big Three, only the number of people is different; it is used in the sense of the dominant group of four. There is also the idiom firing on all (four) cylinders, which means working or functioning at a peak level [2, p. 342].

The number five in the English idioms is associated with the part of the body, namely, with a hand. The idiom give me five is used when you want to hit someone's hand with your hand in order to show that you are very pleased. The idiom a bunch of fives is used in the opposite sense. In this idiom the number five implies a fist or a punch. One more idiom containing the number five and conveying negative meaning is fifth column. It is used in the sense of an organized group of people sympathizing with and working for the enemy within a country at war or otherwise under attack [15, p. 166].

Moreover, the number five is associated with time. The idiom take five is a short form of 'a five-minute break' and it means to take a short break in order to relax (in this idiom number five is associated with five minutes). The expression nine to five refers to typical office hours (in this idiom number five is associated with five o'clock).

The number six holds mainly negative associations. The instances with negative meaning include the idioms: at sixes and sevens, hit (or knock) someone for six, six of the best and six feet under. The idiom at sixes and sevens communicates the meaning of being in a state of total confusion or disarray. The idiom hit (or knock) someone for six conveys the following meaning: to affect someone very severely, in other words, utterly overwhelm someone. Idiom six feet under bears the meaning of dead and buried. The idiom six of one and half a dozen of the other is used to convey that there is no real difference between two alternatives [3, p. 456].

The number seven is not used very frequently to form number idioms in the English language. Originally, the number seven might be associated with something magical. For example, although now the idiom *seven-league boots* means the ability to travel very fast on foot. The idiom *in seventh heaven*, meaning in a state of ecstasy, came from the late Jewish and Muslim theology [9, p. 546].

Only 1 idiom containing the number eight was found. This idiom is *one over the eight*. It was discussed together with the number one.

From the semantic point of view the number nine does not have the established pattern of usage. It can express time, as in the examples: *a nine days' wonder* and mixed type *idiom nine to five*. The idiom *a nine days' wonder* means something that attracts enthusiastic interest for a short while but is then ignored or forgotten; the idiom *nine to five the number nine* expresses nine o'clock and the number five – five o'clock, while the whole idiom is used in the sense of typical office hours. The idiom *on cloud nine* is interchangeable with the expression *in seventh heaven*, communicating the meaning of being extremely happy. One more idiom with the number nine having positive meaning is: *be as right as ninepence*. It is used in

the sense of being completely healthy. Idiom *no more than ninepence in the shilling* describes a person of low intelligence [3, p. 798].

The expression *nine times out of ten* means: on nearly every occasion. In this case the number nine may have the sense of something incomplete and the number ten expresses completion.

The number ten was found in the idiom *two (or ten) a penny*, where it is used interchangeably with the number two. Ten is used as a part of the following mixed idioms: *threescore and ten and nine times out of ten*. Also, the number ten is used in the original sense of counting something. The expression *count to ten* implies counting to ten under your breath in order to prevent yourself from reacting angrily to something. The idiom *it's handbags at ten paces* is a humorous expression used about a fight or argument in which neither side is very effective [3, p. 926].

**Conclusions.** Almost any language is rich in idioms and an individual with only a superficial knowledge of these lexical units will find themselves at a serious disadvantage in discussions, debates, or casual conversations.

An idiom is a number of words which, taken together, mean something different from the individual words of the idiom when they stand alone. The way in which the words are put together is often odd, illogical or even grammatically incorrect.

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It will be useful for students carrying out researches concerning the phenomenon of idioms and their usage. Researchers who are also interested in idioms and their types, and for those who want to make their language colorful and sophisticated.

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**Пукаляк М. В. Ідіоми з цифрами в сучасній англійській мові**

**Анотація.** У статті досліджуються ідіоми з числами в сучасній англійській мові. Проаналізовано роль ідіом, оскільки вони є дуже різнобічними у використанні, а також безпосередньо пов'язані з особистими емоціями та сприяють більш точній передачі думки мовця, роблять мову виразнішою, більш емоційною й навіть той, хто тільки починає її вивчати, може використовувати в ній ідіоми. Також висвітлено загальну характеристику ідіом, окреслено суттєві ознаки та досліджено вживання ідіом із числами в сучасній англійській мові.

**Ключові слова:** ідіома, число, структура, вираз, значення, мовлення.

**Пукаляк М. В. Идиомы с цифрами в современном английском языке**

**Аннотация.** В статье исследуются идиомы с числами в современном английском языке. Проанализирована роль идиом, поскольку они очень разносторонние в использовании, а также непосредственно связаны с личными эмоциями и способствуют более точной передаче мысли говорящего, делают речь более выразительной, более эмоциональной и даже тот, кто только начинает изучать язык, может использовать идиомы. Также освещена общая характеристика идиом, определены существенные признаки и исследовано употребление идиом с числами в современном английском языке.

**Ключевые слова:** идиома, число, структура, выражение, значение, речь.