

Nataliia Ishchuk

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4726-9432>

UDC 811.111'373.7:81'37

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ІДІОМИ НА ПОЗНАЧЕННЯ ЛЮДИНИ В ДІЛОВІЙ АНГЛІЙСЬКІЙ МОВІ: ЕТИМОЛОГІЧНІ, КОГНІТИВНІ ТА КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНІ ОСНОВИ

У статті проаналізовано етимологічне походження, когнітивні механізми утворення та концептуальні моделі англомовних ідіом на позначення людини, які функціонують у діловій англійській мові. У дослідженні використано інтегрований підхід, що поєднує традиційний етимологічний аналіз, типологію когнітивних механізмів формування ідіом та теорію концептуальної метафори. Аналіз джерел походження виявив, що найпродуктивнішими є побут та повсякденне життя (36,1%), професійна сфера та промисловість (20,2%), спорт (8,2%), біблійні та літературні джерела (7%). Аналіз когнітивних механізмів фразеологізації виявив, що домінантним механізмом є метафоризація (69,62%), яка включає зооморфні, соматичні, професійні, побутові, колірні метафори та метафори розміру. Метонімізація становить 5,7% корпусу, структурне варіювання – 11,39%, іронізація та вторинна номінація – 4,43%, калькування та міжкультурні запозичення – 4,43%, гібридні механізми – 4,43%. Когнітивно-концептуальний аналіз дозволив виділити 7 базових метафоричних моделей осмислення людини: ЛЮДИ – ТВАРИНИ, ЛЮДИ – ОБ'ЄКТИ/МАТЕРІАЛИ, ЛЮДИ – МАШИНИ/ІНСТРУМЕНТИ, ЛЮДИ – ФІЗИЧНІ ТІЛА, ЛЮДИ – ОБ'ЄКТИ ВИМІРУ ТА ОЦІНКИ, ЛЮДИ – СОЦІАЛЬНО МАРКОВАНІ ОБ'ЄКТИ, ЛЮДИ – ЕЛЕМЕНТИ ПРОСТОРУ ТА РУХУ.

Ключові слова: ділова англійська мова, ідіома, етимологія, культурне джерело, когнітивний механізм, когнітивно-концептуальний аналіз.

PEOPLE-RELATED IDIOMS IN BUSINESS ENGLISH: ETYMOLOGICAL, COGNITIVE AND CONCEPTUAL ORIGINS

The article examines the etymological origins, cognitive mechanisms of formation, and conceptual models underlying English-language idioms denoting people in Business English discourse. The study adopts an integrated approach combining traditional etymological analysis, a typology of cognitive mechanisms involved in idiom formation, and the theory of conceptual metaphor. The analysis of etymological sources reveals that the most productive domains are everyday life and domestic experience (36.1%), professional and industrial spheres (20.2%), sports (8.2%), and biblical and literary sources (7%). The investigation of cognitive mechanisms of phraseologization demonstrates that metaphORIZATION constitutes the dominant process (69.62%), encompassing zoomorphic, somatic, professional, domestic, colour-based, and size-related metaphors. Metonymization accounts for 5.7% of the corpus, structural variation for 11.39%, irony and secondary nomination for 4.43%, calquing and intercultural borrowings for 4.43%, while hybrid mechanisms also comprise 4.43%. The cognitive-conceptual analysis identified

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seven basic metaphorical models for conceptualizing a person: PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS, PEOPLE ARE OBJECTS/MATERIALS, PEOPLE ARE MACHINES/TOOLS, PEOPLE ARE PHYSICAL BODIES, PEOPLE ARE OBJECTS OF MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION, PEOPLE ARE SOCIALLY LABELED OBJECTS, and PEOPLE ARE ELEMENTS OF SPACE AND MOVEMENT.

Keywords: *business English, idiom, etymology, cultural source, cognitive mechanism, cognitive conceptual analysis.*

Introduction. In the language's phraseological system, idioms are one of the most distinctive manifestations of the linguistic worldview because they convey meaning, evaluation, and social context through their imagery, emotionality, and cultural richness, functioning as semiotic markers of collective experience. In this context, studying their origin allows us to reveal the underlying mechanisms of linguistic imagery formation and to reconstruct the cultural sources of linguistic units.

It is particularly important to study the etymology of these expressions within specific thematic domains, especially in business discourse, which represents one of the most dynamic and significant areas in today's linguistic environment. Idioms about people in business English not only reflect cultural ideas about work, success, or failure, but also form a specific layer of corporate vocabulary. Their origins are linked to various cultural sources, ranging from ancient traditions and mythological imagery to the latest corporate slang.

At the same time, the cognitive-conceptual framework of the analysis is equally important, as it enables us to identify the cognitive processes involved in the formation of business idioms. Combining etymological and conceptual analysis enables tracing the cultural origins and cognitive models underlying the functioning of idioms in business English. All these factors make the study of the etymological, cognitive, and conceptual origins of people-related idioms used within business environments important for understanding the historical development of language and current trends in professional communication.

Review of publications. In linguistics, there are studies devoted to the classification, structure, and origin of idiomatic and phraseological expressions. The importance of cultural context as a source of idioms is emphasised in applied studies (Zhao 2018, Qureshi et al. 2018). And it is in classical works on phraseology, in particular in L. Smith's *Words and Idioms* (Smith 1925), that the focus was placed on the historical and cultural sources of idioms such as seafaring, manufacturing, military practice, and everyday rituals. Among other sources of idioms, the author highlights body parts, devoting a section of his book to somatic idioms. Ukrainian researchers O. Hnatkovska, I. Sapozhnyk, and T. Surodeikina (Гнатковська та ін. 2023) in their study of the etymology of phraseological units with a zoological component in the English language, indicate the following sources of origin for these phraseologisms: the English language environment itself, the professional and industrial domain, ancient mythology and literature, biblical texts, as well as quotes from famous people. The study by G. Chulanova and L. Vnuchkova (Chulanova et al. 2023) examines how idioms reflect the national and cultural characteristics of the English language and provides examples of idioms from various fields, including history, society, gastronomy, and meteorology. Besides, our earlier study (Ishchuk et al. 2024) showed

that color idioms in English-language business discourse form a system of symbols which is the source of the idioms' etymology, and their cognitive interpretation helps explain the motivation behind images in business vocabulary. Ukrainian linguists O. Kuzyk and V. Bialyk (Кузык та ін. 2019) also rely on the traditional approach to studying the origin of English time-related phraselogisms, identifying several sources: the Bible, the English literature, politics, entertainment and show business, jurisprudence, military sphere, sport, and borrowings from other languages. However, the most comprehensive classification (35 sources of idiom origin) was proposed by the Albanian researcher L. Robo (Robo 2013). Another approach to classifying English idioms based on the period of their emergence and history of origins is proposed by N. Hertsovska and T. Shpenyk (Герцовська та ін. 2021).

In Slavic linguistics (Жуйкова 2007), a structural-semantic approach has developed, describing the mechanisms of phraseologization: metaphorization, metonymization, semantic reinterpretation, calquing, ellipsis, etc.

Cognitive linguistics (Lakoff et al. 1980, Kövecses et al. 1996, Kövecses 2006, Kövecses 2010) explains the origin of idioms through conceptual models of metaphors that structure thinking. Furthermore, several linguists have conducted research on metaphor and metonymy, including G. Radden, Z. Kövecses (Radden et al. 1999) and K. Fischer, R. Goeke, and F. Rainer (Fischer et al. 2017), with the latter focusing on the functioning of metaphor, metonymy, and euphemism in economics and business discourse. However, despite the variety of studies devoted to the origins and metaphorical models of English idioms, the etymology of people-related idioms used in business English remains an overlooked area in linguistics. Thus, this concern requires a meticulous investigation through the lens of an integrated approach that combines etymological analysis with cognitive and conceptual motivation and allows for a comprehensive explanation of the etymology of people-related idioms in business English.

The **aim** of the paper is to conduct an etymological and cognitive-conceptual analysis of people-related idioms in business English. Therefore, the following **objectives** were set: to study the etymological sources of people-related idioms in business English; to identify the cognitive mechanisms of idiom formation and main conceptual models involved in the formation of the idioms under study.

The **object** of the study is people-related idioms in business English, and the **subject** is the etymological sources, cognitive mechanisms, and conceptual models of the formation of these idioms.

The study material consists of 158 business English idioms referring to people. The lexical units were selected from authentic lexicographic sources, in particular The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, McGraw-Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs, The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms, Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang, The American Heritage dictionary of the English language, The Facts on File Encyclopedia of Word and Phrase Origins, Dictionary of Idioms and Their Origins, Oxford dictionary of English Idioms; from online sources such as Collins Dictionary, Investopedia, Langeek English dictionary, Online Etymology Dictionary and The Free Dictionary. Moreover, we used authentic vocabulary coursebooks that students use to acquire economic vocabulary skills,

namely *Check Your English Vocabulary for Business and Administration*, *Check Your English Vocabulary for Human Resources*, and *Business Vocabulary in Use*.

Methods used as a methodological basis of the study include theoretical analysis of works on etymology and phraseology; systematic sampling of idiomatic units from selected lexicographic and pedagogical sources; semantic analysis of the selected material; descriptive method for systematizing idioms and explaining their etymological sources; etymological analysis for establishing the historical origins of the units under study; conceptual analysis for identifying cognitive models of metaphorization and metonymisation that form the basis of idiomatic meanings; the method of quantitative analysis for calculating the obtained data and identifying the productivity of various etymological sources; methods of induction and deduction for formulating general conclusions about the patterns of origin and conceptual organization of the studied idioms.

While there are some works on the etymology of English idioms which look at their cultural roots and origins, the etymology of people-related idioms in business English has not been explored enough. Thus, the scientific **novelty** of the study lies in an attempt to conduct a comprehensive etymological analysis of people-related idioms in business English using an integrated approach that includes three components: traditional etymological analysis, cognitive and conceptual analysis.

The **theoretical significance** of this work can be seen in the development of etymological research into English phraseology, particularly idioms used in business English; in deepening the understanding of the cognitive mechanisms involved in forming idiomatic meanings through conceptual metaphor and metonymy; in systematising knowledge about the cultural and historical sources of idioms that refer to people in professional communication. The **practical importance** of the research results is determined by the use of its main provisions in teaching courses on English phraseology, English lexicology, English for specific purposes, intercultural business communication, as well as in the process of compiling textbooks on these subjects.

Results of research. Research into idioms has traditionally focused on their historical and etymological nature. The etymological approach establishes the historical source of the image – the event, artefact, or cultural practice which generated the expression. For example, the expression *have a chip on one's shoulder* is a 19th-century American idiom which refers to a person who is resentful or aggressively ready for conflict. Its origin is linked to a children's custom: boys would place a wooden chip on their shoulder as a challenge to a fight, and whoever knocked it off accepted the challenge (Hendrickson 2008: 175). Over time, the expression took on a figurative meaning – constant resentment, a tendency to quarrel, or demonstrative hostility. Its usage in business English is illustrated in the sentence *He has had a chip on his shoulder ever since he didn't get the promotion he was expecting* (Merriam-Webster).

The popularity of this approach is explained by the fact that it allows tracing the origins of images and establishing the cultural and social conditions of their emergence, because, as G. Chulanova and L. Vnuchkova argue, phraseological units reflect the historical experience, social perceptions, mental stereotypes, and values of a nation. The authors also note that awareness of the cultural connotations of phraseological

units, which are a source of knowledge about national identity, is important for effective intercultural communication (Chulanova et al. 2023). Moreover, understanding etymology can be useful for learning and interpreting idioms (Qureshi et al., 2018), while H. Zhao explains that lack of knowledge regarding cultural or historical context leads to a phenomenon known as “cultural default” (Zhao 2018). Therefore, the etymological approach remains extremely important, as it explains the motivation behind an expression and enables the reconstruction of its development stages from the original meaning to its current usage.

Researchers identify a wide range of sources of English idioms, covering cultural, historical, and social realities (Гнатковська та ін. 2023; Кузик та ін. 2019; Chulanova et al. 2023; Smith 1925; Robo 2013). They include historical events, folklore, ancient mythology, traditions and customs, literary works, authorial texts, biblical sources, fairy tales, religion, politics, and socio-political processes. The material and natural world is represented by everyday objects, plants, body parts, atmospheric phenomena, astronomy, physics, anatomy, zoology, colours, numbers, food, as well as the issues of death, illness, and health. Professional and social activities include agriculture, industry, maritime and fishing, the military, sports, music, painting, business, banking, telephony, trading, gambling, law, entertainment, and show business. Finally, linguistic and cultural contacts include borrowings from other languages, Americanisms, dialects, as well as intercultural communication and professional practices.

It should be noted that people-related idioms in business English are fixed expressions whose meaning reflects a certain social or professional characteristic of a person: type of employee, professional role, behaviour pattern, or status within the context of work interaction, management, leadership, negotiations, finance, or organizational hierarchy. In addition, such idioms often convey evaluative connotations (positive or negative) and can denote not only permanent roles but also temporary states or situations of a person. The analysis of the selected idioms showed that the origin of idioms reflects the multi-layered nature of cultural and social processes.

The largest group of English idioms consists of **everyday expressions** – 57 units, more than a third of the corpus (36.1%). For example, *backseat driver* comes from 20th-century automotive culture: a passenger who interferes with driving has become a symbol of an annoying advisor. In business English, this image refers to a person who imposes unnecessary instructions without having any real authority (Hendrickson 2008: 52). The idiom *smart cookie* originated in American slang in the mid-20th century, where *cookie* referred to a person with certain characteristics (Lighter 1994: 472; Hendrickson 2008: 768). In modern usage, it refers to a quick-witted, resourceful person who is able to find solutions quickly (Collins Dictionary). *Golden boy/girl* is a metaphor for a favourite or talented employee, popularised by C. Odets' play *Golden Boy* (Ammer 2013: 253). Another expression, *dead duck*, refers to a person or situation doomed to failure or defeat (The American Heritage dictionary 2016: 465); in a business context, it is often used to describe initiatives that have lost support, funding, or market prospects, as illustrated in the sentence *The idea of another TV channel is now a dead duck* (The Free Dictionary).

This group also includes numerous comparisons with animals (*busy as a bee, sly as a fox*, etc.) and images (*rough diamond, jack of all trades*, etc.) to describe character. For example, *busy as a bee* is an English idiom which means extraordinary diligence and constant busyness (Hendrickson 2008: 137).

The second largest group is the **professional world and industry**, with 32 lexical units (20.2%). This is corporate and bureaucratic slang that originated in the workplace. For example, *seagull manager* is an expression introduced by K. Blanchard in the 1980s to describe a leadership style based on episodic intervention without a deep understanding of the situation (Blanchard et al. 2023: 10). It describes a manager who only becomes involved in a matter when a problem is perceived to have arisen, especially when they have little other knowledge about said matter and only cause more problems as a result of their involvement (The Free Dictionary). *Loan shark* comes from the metaphor of a predator attacking its prey and is used to describe lenders who charge excessive interest rates (The American Heritage dictionary 2016: 1028), and *number cruncher* is a slang idiom which refers to a person who performs numerous calculations, especially an accountant, financier, or analyst (The American Heritage dictionary 2016: 1210).

Sports idioms account for 13 items (8.2%). For example, the expression *drop the ball* (to miss an opportunity) comes from American football, where a player drops the ball (Hendrickson 2008: 262). The idiom *poker-faced* originated at American gambling tables in the late 19th century. In poker, an experienced player had to hide any emotions so as not to reveal the value of their cards. This is how the expression *poker face* came about — an impassive, indifferent, restrained face that does not allow the opponent to understand their true intentions (Flavell 2006: 148). Over time, this expression went beyond card games and began to refer to people who demonstratively control their emotions in any situation – from business negotiations to political debates.

Biblical and literary sources are represented by 11 units (7%). The idiom *wolf in sheep's clothing* is one of the oldest expressions still used in many languages. It dates back to biblical times and is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 7:15: *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves* (Hendrickson 2008: 897). The idiom refers to a person who hides their true intentions behind a mask of friendliness, often with the aim of deceiving or manipulating others. Literary sources have also enriched English phraseology. For example, the expression *girl/boy Friday* (a loyal assistant) comes from Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), where Friday was Robinson's devoted servant and assistant. Initially, in the 20th century, only the term *girl Friday* was used for secretaries, but later a gender-neutral version appeared (Hendrickson, 2008: 327). Another idiom, *movers and shakers*, originated in poetry and gradually became part of everyday language. In 1874, English poet A. O'Shonesy wrote in his poem *Ode: We are the music makers, And we are the dreamers of dreams... We are the movers and shakers Of the world for ever, it seems*. At first, the metaphor had an almost sacred connotation, meaning “those who move and shake the world” – a divine force that controls events. However, by the late 19th century, the term had begun to be used to describe people such as politicians, businesspeople and artists who had a significant

impact on society. In the 20th century, *movers and shakers* became established as a term for the elite, those who determine the direction of development in art, economics, or politics. In newspaper articles and business reports, this phrase was used to refer to top managers, investors, cultural figures – anyone who initiates new processes and shapes trends (Ammer 2013: 545; Ayto 2010: 234; Hendrickson 2008: 532).

Traditions and rituals are at the root of 8 idiomatic expressions (5.1%). They reflect cultural patterns of behaviour. For example, *(keep a) stiff upper lip* is an idiom which has become a symbol of restraint, emotional composure, and inner discipline, especially in the British cultural context. One explanation is associated with young British officers who carefully groomed their moustaches to avoid trembling of the upper lip, a sign of emotional immaturity in the eyes of their commanders. Despite this image, historical sources indicate that the phrase is of American origin: it appeared in New England around 1830 (Hendrickson 2008: 793). The idiom *give the cold shoulder*, meaning “to intentionally appear disinterested toward one; to snub”, usually refers to the act of ignoring someone (The Free Dictionary). The phrase was first recorded in the works of Sir W. Scott in the early 19th century. At that time, in English homes hot meat was served to welcome guests and cold shoulder of mutton to those who stayed too long or were unwelcome. This culinary gesture became a metaphor for distancing oneself (Hendrickson 2008: 192).

Maritime jargon, which dominated the English language during the era of maritime expansion, gave rise to 7 fixed idioms (4.43%). For instance, the idiom *learn/know the ropes* (to know the specifics of the job) directly refers to the profession of a 19th-century sailor. On fully equipped sailing ships, the system of ropes was extremely complex, and novices had to learn all the “ropes” to become experienced sailors (Hendrickson 2008: 482; Siefring 2004: 164). The expression *dead weight* comes from the 17th-century nautical term *deadweight tonnage* meaning “the carrying capacity of a ship”, i.e., the weight of cargo that does not contribute to the movement of the ship. In a figurative sense, it is a person or factor that slows down the process, is of no use, but requires resources (The American Heritage dictionary 2016: 466).

Historical events and **social practices** are also represented by 7 idioms (4.43%). For example, *goldbrick* is an idiom which originated as the name of a fraudulent scheme and later became military slang. In the second half of the 19th century, swindlers in the American West sold investors lead or iron bars coated with gold paint, claiming they were real gold. Such frauds became so widespread that the word *goldbrick* became established as a word for any kind of deception or fraud. Later, during World War I, it became part of military lexicon. Soldiers began to call those who avoided work, pretending to be busy or sick in order to avoid service, *goldbricks*. The first recorded use of the term in this sense was in 1914, when it was used to refer to lieutenants appointed from civilian life (Hendrickson 2008: 352). Thus, *goldbrick* evolved from literal fraud to a metaphor for an idler or a pretender, retaining its negative connotation in modern usage. The idiom **company man** emerged in the 1920s, during a period of intense labour unrest in the United States. The component **company** is used in the meaning “business enterprise”, and the idiom reflects tensions between management and organized labour characteristic of that historical period.

Notably, the expression was frequently used with negative connotations by supporters of labour unions, functioning as a label for individuals perceived as prioritising corporate interests over collective worker solidarity. This idiom denotes an employee who demonstrates primary loyalty to the employer rather than to fellow workers; in some contexts, it may also imply informing on colleagues (Ammer 2013: 173).

Intercultural borrowings account for 6 units (3.8%). They demonstrate the influence of different cultural traditions. For example, the idiom *low man on the totem pole* comes from Native American culture and refers to a person with the lowest status, the least important or least influential person in the hierarchy (Ammer 2013: 510); *paper tiger* (weak despite outward strength) was borrowed from Chinese (纸老虎, zhǐ lǎohǔ) and was popularized by Mao Zedong in 1946 in the context of characterizing the United States as a country that looks threatening but does not actually have real power (Siefring 2004: 212). This is an example of direct lexical borrowing into business phraseology, which testifies to the globalization of business communication.

The **military sphere** is represented by 5 units (3.2%). The phrase *eager beaver* is an English idiom that is used ironically to describe a person who works very hard and tries very hard to impress their managers. However, this person can often annoy their colleagues with how obsessive they are. This expression originates from 1940s military slang and is based on the image of a hard-working beaver, an animal traditionally associated with tireless work. Unlike the more neutral *busy as a beaver*, which dates back to the 18th century, *eager beaver* has a distinctly negative connotation; it is used to criticise excessive initiative bordering on intrusiveness. In a business context, the idiom is often used to describe employees who demonstrate excessive diligence, which is not always suitable for teamwork (Hendrickson, 2008, p. 269). The origin of the expression *old guard* is associated with Napoleon's Imperial Guard, created in 1804 as an elite unit of the French army. These troops, known as the *Vieille Garde* ("old guard"), were distinguished by their particular loyalty to Napoleon, received better conditions of service than other soldiers, and symbolized resistance to any change. (Hendrickson, 2008, p. 610). Nowadays, the idiom refers to long-standing members of a country, organization, or political group who consistently resist change within their sphere of influence (The Free Dictionary). Its usage in a business context is illustrated in the sentence *Some of the old guard were resentful that a newcomer had been appointed to the post* (OLD).

Astronomy provided only 1 idiom, *rising star* (0.6%), which derives from the celestial image of an ascending star, first recorded in the 17th century (OED).

Etymologically opaque and controversial idioms account for 7 units (4.43%). Their origin cannot be reconstructed unambiguously and remains a subject of scientific debate. For instance, *big cheese* is an American idiom that refers to an important person, a leader, a "big boss." It originated around 1890, but its roots are much deeper and more unexpected. In 19th-century English, there was an expression *the cheese*, which meant something correct, the best, the main thing. This expression, in turn, is a distortion of the word "chiz" or "cheez" – a Persian and Urdu word which simply means "thing" or "object." The British brought it from India around the 1840s, and it gradually transformed into the slang term *the cheese*. When Americans added the

adjective “big” to it, the phrase *big cheese* was formed – meaning “a big thing” or “a big shot” (Hendrickson 2008: 82).

Slang with ambiguous etymology comprises 4 units (2.5%). For example, *whiz kid* refers to a talented young person, but the origin of the word “whiz” remains unclear (OED). The expression *smart aleck* originated in the US around the 1860s. Although there is no definitive confirmation of the existence of a real “smart aleck,” researchers suggest that the source may have been Alec Hoag, a 19th-century swindler and charlatan known for his ingenuity. It was his behaviour that may have formed the basis for the metaphor *smart aleck* – a person who irritates those around him with his self-confident, defiant displays of knowledge (Hendrickson 2008: 767).

The analysis of the etymology and usage of English business idioms has revealed their complexity and diversity of figurative sources. However, an etymological description or thematic grouping alone is not sufficient for a complete understanding of the mechanisms of their formation. It is necessary to refer to the cognitive-semantic processes that underlie phraseologisation. In our study, we applied the typology of origin proposed by M. Zhuykova (Жуйкова 2007) to trace the internal mechanisms of transforming free word combinations into fixed idioms. Let us take a closer look at them.

1. **Metaphorization**, i.e., the transfer of meaning based on similarity, proved to be the most productive mechanism for creating idioms to denote a person (110 units, 69.62%). In the process of phraseological metaphorization, it is not an individual component that is reinterpreted, but a free word combination as a whole, resulting in the formation of a holistic, indivisible meaning. Among the idioms formed through metaphor, we distinguished several subtypes.

1.1. *Zoomorphic metaphor*. Observed characteristics of animals are transferred to humans. For example, *lame duck* originally referred to a wounded duck that could not fly with the others, but later was metaphorically reinterpreted as a leader who lost power at the end of their term, etc. Among zoomorphic metaphors, a subgroup of predators and prey stands out: *loan shark* (predatory shark → high-interest lender), *scared as a rabbit* (prey behaviour → intense fear), etc. Professional and activity metaphors involving animals include *top dog* (leader of the pack → leader), *stress puppy* (puppy under stress → person who constantly complains when working under stress), *idea hamster* (hamster in a wheel → generator of endless ideas without results), etc. In comparative structures (*sly as a fox*, *stubborn as a mule*, *brave as a lion*, *busy as a bee*) the similarity between the source and target domains is explicitly marked.

1.2. *Somatic metaphor* is based on reinterpreting body parts, physiological reactions, and spatial orientations as characteristics of a person’s mental state, emotions, or behaviour. Thus, *big head* and *swelled head* represent arrogance through the idea of a disproportionately large head; *eagle eyes* transfers the sharp vision of a predator to human alertness. The idiom *keep a civil tongue (in one’s head)* use the organ of speech as a metaphor for communicative behaviour, while *at the back of somebody* realises a spatial metaphor of support.

1.3. *Professional metaphor*. Military, sports, maritime, and gambling images are transferred to the business context. For instance, the military metaphor in the idiom *hired gun* transfers the image of a hired gunman to a professional performer of complex

tasks. *Hip-shooter* (one who shoots from the hip, without aiming) metaphorically means an impulsive person, etc. Sports metaphors are represented in the idioms *get the ball rolling* (to start something) and *drop the ball* (to fail at a task), which transfer football/basketball actions to the business process; *play a straight bat* — a metaphor from cricket, where a straight bat symbolizes fair play, etc. A maritime metaphor can be found in the idioms *keep on (the) course* (stay on course → maintain a strategic direction) and *loose cannon* (an unsecured cannon on deck → an unpredictable dangerous person), which reflects the real danger of unsecured weapons on a ship during a storm, etc. The gambling metaphor is represented by two units: *hold all the aces* (to have all the advantages) and *poker face* (an unreadable face).

1.4. *Size/height metaphor*. Physical size is conceptualized as social status. The idioms *big cheese*, *top dog*, and *high flyer* confirm the conceptual metaphor STATUS IS UP / SIZE IS IMPORTANCE.

1.5. *Colour metaphor* is based on symbolic associations of colour, which are reinterpreted as social and professional markers. As shown in the study by Ishchuk, Osadchuk, and Sergushova (Ishchuk et al., 2024), the semantics of colour in idioms often differs from its free use, acquiring new meanings in a business context. For example, *blue-eyed boy* symbolizes exceptionality and trust; *golden boy* – success and prestige; *dark horse* – obscurity and secrecy.

1.6. *Other metaphorical models*. In everyday metaphors, there is a clear transfer of specific objects or phenomena to human behaviour and evaluation. For example, *armchair critic* metaphorically refers to a person who, sitting comfortably in an armchair, symbolizes passivity and a tendency to criticize without actually participating. *Backseat driver* uses the image of the back seat of a car to convey interference in the driving process without real responsibility. The expression *cut corners* transfers the action of “cutting corners” to saving time or resources at the expense of quality. The idiom *burn the midnight oil* refers to the old practice of working at night by the light of an oil lamp, metaphorically denoting hard work late into the night.

2. **Metonymy** is represented by 9 idioms (5.7%) and is based on the associative contiguity between elements of a single situation: an attribute denotes a carrier, an action denotes an agent, a function denotes a person, etc. Thus, the expression *pencil-whip* metonymically transfers the object – a pencil – to the action of quickly and formally signing documents without real content. In the idiomatic expression *empty suit*, the suit as an external attribute of status is transferred to the person it symbolizes, and the adjective *empty* emphasizes the lack of content or competence. Thus, the shell (suit) becomes a sign of a person reduced to external formalities and creates a negative evaluation – a designation of an employee or manager who has only appearance but no real value.

3. **Structural variation** covers 18 units (11.4%) and is implemented through component substitution, expansion, or reduction of existing phraseological models. Thus, the idioms *big gun*, *big shot*, *big wheel*, and *big wig* are variants of a single metaphorical scheme with the invariant meaning “influential person.” The series *man of action/man of sense/man of courage/man of heart* demonstrates expansion through variation of an abstract noun while preserving the syntactic pattern “person + abstract quality.”

4. **Irony** and **secondary nomination** represent 7 units (4.43%) and play an important role in the formation of evaluative and expressive idioms. For example, the expression *smart aleck* is based on the ironic use of the positive attribute “smart” to characterize a person who demonstrates arrogance and self-confidence. The origin of the name Aleck (a variant of Alexander) is debatable, but the ironic tone is obvious: “smart” here means “one who thinks he is smart.” *Happy camper* (“happy tourist” → a satisfied person) is more often used in a negative form (“not a happy camper”), which enhances the ironic effect.

5. **Calques** and **intercultural borrowings** also account for 7 units (4.43%) and reflect intercultural interaction in the formation of the phraseological fund. For example, the idiom *head honcho* comes from the Japanese *hanchō* and originally referred to the senior member of a group (Merriam-Webster; Longman Dictionary). This group also includes biblical calques, for example, *voice in the wilderness*, which reflects the figurative structure of the biblical expression (φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, **phōnē boōntos en tē erēmō**) found in the Greek New Testament (BibleHub) and later transmitted into English through biblical translation tradition.

6. **Hybrid mechanisms** (7 units, 4.43%) combine several cognitive processes simultaneously. For example, *rough diamond* (a talented person without education) combines the metaphor of a precious stone with its antithesis (valuable but unpolished). The mechanism includes both a figurative transfer from geology to human personality and the semantic opposition “natural value vs. cultural refinement.” The expression *wet blanket* combines metonymy and metaphor: the object — a wet blanket, which literally cools down the heat — is transferred to a person who discourages enthusiasm (metonymy), at the same time creating an image of coldness and undesirable influence (metaphor). This double transfer forms a negative evaluation, denoting someone who “cools” the atmosphere and destroys the energy of others with their behaviour. Another idiom illustrating the combination of metonymy and metaphor is *loose tongue*. It uses the organ – the tongue – metaphorically to represent communicative behaviour, and as a substitute for speech, emphasizing uncontrolled talkativeness and a tendency to reveal secrets. Some linguists emphasize the importance of the interaction between metaphor and metonymy as two key cognitive processes (Radden et al. 1999) that provide imagery and evaluativeness in business communication, while K. Fischer, R. Goeke, and F. Rainer (Fischer et al. 2017) argue that it also creates expressiveness, influencing the perception of social roles.

The data obtained confirm the general trend described in cognitive linguistics: metaphor is the leading mechanism for the creation of idioms, while metonymy has a significantly lower profile. As classical studies show (Lakoff et al. 1980; Kövecses et al. 1996; Kövecses 2006; Kövecses 2010), the origin of idioms can be explained by conceptual models of metaphors that structure thinking.

The analysis of metaphorization mechanisms demonstrates that the imagery of idioms is based on systemic ways of understanding reality. These ways reflect deep cognitive processes through which people structure abstract concepts through their experience of interacting with the physical and social world. That is why further analysis of metaphorical idioms requires reference to the theory of conceptual

metaphor as one of the key provisions of cognitive linguistics. According to cognitive linguistics, a conceptual metaphor means interpreting one sphere of experience in terms of another, expressed by the formula “A is B” (Kövecses 2010). In this case, linguistic metaphor, in particular phraseological metaphor, is considered not as an isolated figurative device, but as a verbalized manifestation of deeper conceptual connections.

With this in mind, we identified 7 cognitive-conceptual models that represent people in business idioms. In these models, PERSON is a universal concept that serves as the target of metaphorization: it is their traits, status, behaviour, and emotions that become the semantic centre of meaning transfer.

1. **PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS.** Human traits are explained through animal behaviour (*brave as a lion, sly as a fox, top dog*, etc.). Here, the animal metaphor becomes a cognitive tool for describing social roles, strengths, or weaknesses.

2. **PEOPLE ARE OBJECTS/MATERIALS.** People are perceived as objects or materials (*empty suit, tough nut, rough diamond, wet blanket*, etc.). The concept of the metaphor here lies in transferring the properties of physical objects – emptiness, hardness, fragility – to a person or behaviour.

3. **PEOPLE ARE MACHINES/TOOLS.** People are actively mechanized in business English (*bean counter, number cruncher, loose cannon*, etc.). The metaphor of a machine or tool emphasizes functionality, automatism, and often the dehumanization of labour.

4. **PEOPLE ARE PHYSICAL BODIES.** Physical experience is used to conceptualize intellectual and emotional characteristics (*big head, eagle eyes, loose tongue*, etc.). Body parts and physiological reactions become markers of internal states and behaviour.

5. **PEOPLE ARE OBJECTS OF MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION.** Physical parameters – size, height, weight – are understood as indicators of status (*big cheese, big shot, high flyer*, etc.). The metaphor of size structures hierarchy and social significance.

6. **PEOPLE ARE SOCIALLY LABELED OBJECTS.** External attributes, such as color, serve as a means of social differentiation (*white-collar worker, blue-collar worker, golden boy*, etc.). Colour symbolism reflects professional identity and social role.

7. **PEOPLE ARE ELEMENTS OF SPACE AND MOVEMENT.** Spatial landmarks and movement describe social relationships and actions (*in somebody's corner, run around in circles, between a rock and a hard place*, etc.). The metaphor of space and movement structures ideas about support, conflict, or stagnation.

In various models, a person appears as a multidimensional image – biological (through animal characteristics and bodily experience), active (through professional roles and institutional scenarios), physical (through parameters of size, space, and movement), and socially symbolic (through color markers and cultural associations). This versatility illustrates that metaphorical models serve as a tool for systematically understanding humans as a central concept in business English.

Conclusions. The study of 158 people-related idioms used in business English shows that the most productive sources of their origin are everyday expressions (36.1%), professional world and industry (20.2%), sports (8.2%), and biblical and

literary sources (7%). Less productive are traditions and rituals (5.1%), maritime jargon (4.43%), historical events and social practices (4.43%), intercultural borrowings (3.8%), military sphere (3.2%), astronomy (0.6%), slang with ambiguous etymology (2.5%), and etymologically opaque and controversial idioms (4.4%).

The findings of the analysis of cognitive mechanisms of idiom formation confirm the general trend observed in the studies by K. Fischer, R. Goeke, and F. Rainer (Fischer et al. 2017): metaphor is the leading mechanism of idiom formation, while metonymy has a significantly lower presence. In our material, metaphor is realized through various subtypes – zoomorphic, somatic, professional, spatial, colour, and everyday models – and accounts for 69.62%, while metonymy covers only 5.7% of units. Other cognitive mechanisms include structural variation (11.39%), irony and secondary nomination (4.43%), calquing and intercultural borrowing (4.43%), as well as hybrid mechanisms (4.43%).

The cognitive-conceptual analysis revealed 7 basic metaphorical models of conceptualizing a person: PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS, PEOPLE ARE OBJECTS/MATERIALS, PEOPLE ARE MACHINES/TOOLS, PEOPLE ARE PHYSICAL BODIES, PEOPLE ARE OBJECTS OF MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION, PEOPLE ARE SOCIALLY LABELED OBJECTS, PEOPLE ARE ELEMENTS OF SPACE AND MOVEMENT. These models illustrate that a person is a multidimensional concept – biological, active, physical, and socio-symbolic.

However, the study does not cover the entire diversity of idiomatic usage in business English. A promising area for further research is the study of metaphor subtypes in business idioms (zoomorphic, somatic, professional, spatial, and color models), which will provide a deeper understanding of how metaphorical transfers reflect social roles, professional practices, and cultural perceptions in the field of business communication.

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PEOPLE-RELATED IDIOMS IN BUSINESS ENGLISH: ETYMOLOGICAL, COGNITIVE AND CONCEPTUAL ORIGINS

Nataliia Ishchuk

Department of English for Specific Purposes, Vasyl' Stus Donetsk National University, Vinnytsia, Ukraine.

Abstract

Background: In contemporary business communication, idiomatic expressions serve as powerful tools for conveying evaluation, emotion, and social roles. Mastery of idioms enhances clarity, expressiveness, and persuasiveness in professional interaction. Scholars increasingly focus on the cognitive mechanisms underlying idiom formation, with special attention to metaphorization as the most productive process. However, comprehensive exploration of idioms denoting people in business discourse remains limited, necessitating further investigation.

Purpose: The aim of this paper is to conduct an etymological and cognitive conceptual analysis of people related idioms in business English.

Results: The study of 158 idioms revealed that everyday life (36.1%), professional sphere and industry (20.2%), sports and competitions (8.2%), and biblical/literary sources (7.0%) constitute the most productive cultural origins. Less productive sources together account for 21%. By cognitive mechanisms, metaphorization dominates (69.62%), followed by structural variation (11.39%), metonymization (5.7%), ironization (4.43%), borrowings and calques (4.43%), and hybrid models (4.43%). Within metaphorization, several subtypes were identified: zoomorphic, somatic, professional, spatial, color, and everyday metaphors. The cognitive conceptual analysis identified seven basic

metaphorical models of construing the human being: PEOPLE ARE ANIMALS, PEOPLE ARE OBJECTS/MATERIALS, PEOPLE ARE MACHINES/TOOLS, PEOPLE ARE PHYSICAL BODY, PEOPLE ARE OBJECTS OF MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION, PEOPLE ARE SOCIALLY MARKED OBJECTS, and PEOPLE ARE ELEMENTS OF SPACE AND MOVEMENT.

Discussion: The findings highlight metaphorization as the central cognitive process shaping idiomatic representation of people in business discourse. Its subtypes reflect cultural models and professional practices, reinforcing the conceptual structuring of workplace communication. While metonymy, irony, and hybrid mechanisms contribute to expressive diversity, metaphor remains the dominant force. Future research should further explore metaphor subtypes in business idioms (zoomorphic, somatic, professional, spatial, and colour models), which will provide a deeper understanding of how metaphorical transfers reflect social roles, professional practices, and cultural perceptions in the field of business communication.

Keywords: business English, idioms, etymology, cultural sources, cognitive mechanisms, cognitive conceptual analysis.

Vitae

Nataliia Ishchuk is PhD in Education, Associate Professor, Associate Professor at the Department of Foreign Languages for Specific Purposes at Vasyl' Stus Donetsk National University. Her areas of interest include difficulties in translating economic texts, linguistic features of economic vocabulary, structural features of economic terminology, idioms in business discourse, neologisms in business discourse.

Correspondence: ischuk.n@donnu.edu.ua

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