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## THE AXIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF IDIOMS IN ENGLISH MEDIA DISCOURSE

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**Key words:** axiology, idiomatic axiology, evaluation, idiom, media discourse.

Current research in phraseology focuses on dissecting the structural and functional facets of axiology within language systems. This entails studying linguistic tools for expressing evaluation, its role in discourse and text, and the evolving axiological trends in phraseological semantics. However, the categorization of evaluation in idioms remains underexplored. Idiomatic axiology is often overlooked in modern linguistics, deemed a nascent area. Nonetheless, idioms heavily imbue evaluation, less as descriptors and more as interpreters and conveyors of subjective attitudes.

Cultural and historical experiences shape emotionally charged language attitudes, guided by societal assessment criteria. Cultural norms, comprising rules, standards, and boundaries, dictate acceptable behavior, reflected in linguistic norms – persistent linguistic elements adopted by societies at specific times.

An axiological worldview, shaped by idiomatic fragments, crafts a unique lens through which individuals interpret reality. This evaluative perspective encompasses individuals, social groups, and nations, intersecting language consciousness, reality, and language as a cognitive tool. Through linguistic expressions, attitudes towards the world are verbalized, adhering to aesthetic principles championed by artists and creators. This worldview is crystallized through idiomatic expressions that convey nuanced interpretations of reality, presenting a distinct human perspective and its relationship with the environment.

Evaluation within idiomatic semantics enriches meaning by appraising persons, objects, phenomena, or processes based on their alignment with subjective needs, interests, desires, and tastes. In media discourse, idioms transcend mere depiction, instead of interpreting and evaluating the world while conveying subjective viewpoints.

Authorial adaptations of axiological idioms, such as expansions, ellipsis and structural modifications, personalize language use, bringing it closer to specific contexts with stylistic expertise. Structural modifications enhance clarity and relevance, manifesting idiomatic creativity in conveying meliorative or pejorative evaluations.

# АКСІОЛОГІЧНИЙ ВИМІР ІДІОМ В АНГЛОМОВНОМУ МЕДІАДИСКУРСІ

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**Ключові слова:** аксіологія, ідіоматична аксіологія, оцінка, ідіома, медіадискурс.

Сучасні дослідження у сфері фразеології зосереджені на вивченні структурних і функціональних аспектів аксіології в межах мовних систем. Це передбачає вивчення засобів вираження оцінки, її ролі в дискурсі та тексті, а також еволюцію аксіологічних тенденцій у фразеологічній семантиці. Однак категоризація оцінки в ідіомах залишається не досить дослідженою. Ідіоматичну аксіологію часто ігнорують у сучасній лінгвістиці, вважаючи її новоствореною галуззю. Тим не менш ідіоми значною мірою містять оцінку радше як інтерпретатори та виразники суб'єктивного ставлення, аніж як прості дескриптори.

Культурний та історичний досвід формує емоційно забарвлене ставлення, що грунтується на суспільних критеріях оцінки. Культурні норми, які включають правила, стандарти та критерії, диктують поведінку, відображену в нормах мови – стійких елементах, прийнятих суспільством у певний час.

Аксіологічний світогляд, сформований за допомогою фрагментів ідіоматики, створює унікальну лінзу, крізь яку людина інтерпретує дійсність. Ця оцінна перспектива охоплює окремих осіб, соціальні групи та нації, перетинаючи лінгвокультурну свідомість, дійсність і мову як когнітивний інструмент. Ставлення до світу, що відповідає естетичним принципам, вербалізується за допомогою різних мовних засобів. Це світосприйняття кристалізується в ідіоматичних виразах, які передають різноманітні інтерпретації дійсності, представляючи окрему перспективу людини та її стосунки з навколишнім середовищем.

Оцінка в ідіоматичній семантиці збагачує значення, оцінюючи осіб, предмети, явища чи процеси на основі їхньої відповідності суб'єктивним потребам, інтересам, бажанням і смакам. У медіадискурсі ідіоми виходять за межі простого зображення, натомість пояснюють та оцінюють світ, висловлюючи суб'єктивну думку.

Авторські трансформації аксіологічних ідіом, такі як додавання, еліпс чи структурні модифікації, персоналізують використання мови, пристосовуючи її до конкретного контексту за допомогою стилістичної майстерності. Структурні модифікації підвищують зрозумілість і доречність, проявляючи ідіоматичну креативність у вираженні меліоративних або пейоративних оцінок.

**Problem statement.** Idiomatic axiology is intertwined with numerous peripheral sciences and branches of knowledge, particularly those establishing the framework for examining the world's value systems. Contemporary phraseology focuses on exploring the structural and functional aspects of evaluation and its significance within the language system. This includes the linguistic tools used to express evaluation, the position of evaluation within expressions and texts, and the primary trends in axiological shifts within

phraseological semantic structures. However, the issue of the evaluation category in phraseology still remains less researched. Modern phraseologists often overlook idiomatic axiology, considering it a new and largely unexplored area within linguistics. Despite this, idioms are heavily imbued with evaluation, serving less to describe the world and more to interpret, assess, and convey subjective attitudes toward it.

Values that emerged as spiritual foundations at the dawn of human history serve to hierarchize reality,

impart meaning through value judgments, and relate to ideals of the desirable, normative, or unacceptable, thereby guiding behavior. According to D. Ilieva, the importance of these value orientations for different ethnic groups has led to their "coding" within each national language, particularly within vocabulary, phraseology, and proverbs. This coding often involves embedding evaluative components into the denotative or connotative meanings of words and using stylistic and metaphorical elements in idiomatic expressions and sayings to convey messages across generations [Ilieva, 2017, p. 25].

Consequently, the emotionally charged attitudes within a language are shaped by the worldview of its native speakers, informed by their cultural and historical experiences, and influenced by the prevailing assessment criteria of their society [Byessonova, 2021, p. 261]. Cultural norms include rules, standards, prescriptions, templates, institutions, and boundaries, whose breach is considered unacceptable and elicits negative responses from the cultural community. Linguistic norms are generally defined as the established and persistent linguistic elements and their usage rules that a society adopts at a specific time.

An axiological worldview, shaped by fragments derived from idioms, constructs a unique perspective on the world. Each individual interprets and reflects upon reality through the lens of their social, personal, and cultural experiences. At the core of this evaluative worldview are individuals, social and cultural groups, as well as states and nations. This framework intersects with language consciousness, reality itself, and language as a tool for understanding and expressing knowledge about the world [Prihodko, 2018, p. 65].

Through language, attitudes towards the world are verbalized, often guided by aesthetic principles adhered to by artists and cultural creators. This worldview is formed through specific linguistic expressions that convey particular senses and interpretations of reality. Ultimately, the axiological image of the world represents a distinct interpretation of humanity and its relationship with the environment.

According to S. Hanzha and H. Onyshchenko, evaluation within the semantics of idioms enriches meaning significantly by expressing the degree of value attributed to a person, object, phenomenon, or process [Ганжа, Онищенко, 2016, с. 37]. It reflects their alignment with the needs, interests, desires, and tastes of the subject. The intricate nature of evaluation results in various classifications of this category. Notably, sociology, anthropology, and linguistic axiology lack a universally accepted typology of evaluations.

In media discourse, idioms often emerge not merely to depict the world but to interpret it, evaluate it, and convey a subjective viewpoint towards it [Мізін, 2008, с. 69]. Multiple evaluative dimensions of idioms intertwine, undergoing individual-authorial

transformations that gradate these expressions. As a result, a conventional, familiar expression expands its axiological assessment, transforming into something distinctive and unexpected, thereby capturing the reader's attention.

Thus, idiomatic expressions shape strategies for assessing phenomena in objective reality, establish an axiological worldview, and define norms that dictate appropriate behavior. The issue of values remains perennially relevant, intertwined with concepts such as good/evil, justice/injustice, and others, ensuring its enduring relevance in discourse.

The article **aims** to explore and analyze the axiological aspects of idioms within the context of English media discourse.

The **subject** of the article is the axiological dimension of idioms within English media discourse. The **object** of the article is the idioms themselves as they are used in English media discourse. It includes analyzing the specific idiomatic expressions, their evaluative components, and the way these idioms are interpreted and transformed in media texts to reflect cultural norms and values.

The research **material** comprises 50 idioms sourced from articles published in "The Guardian" between 2019 and 2024.

Presentation of the main research material. Evaluation, explicitly or implicitly expressed in media texts, is a signal of axiological information. Axiological information is structurally, functionally and semantically discrete and is interpreted as a necessary link that can ensure the pragmatic effect of the message. The ability of evaluation to modify the axiological level of the message (to express compliance or non-compliance with the norm of certain qualities of the object of speech), the pragmatic and communicative level (to activate the communicative recipient) determines its interpretation as an obligatory component of the conceptual structure of axiological and persuasive texts.

The initial step in analyzing the axiological parameter of idioms involves identifying evaluative vocabulary within their composition or interpretation. This is crucial for distinguishing between evaluative and neutral idioms, and for determining whether they carry a positive or negative connotation. It is essential to compile a comprehensive list of relevant evaluative identifiers, known as evaluatively marked lexemes. Linguistic research has developed specific methodologies for categorizing various semantic groups of words, including evaluative terms. A straightforward yet time-intensive approach involves consulting dictionaries, which highlight common axiological correlates associated with the concepts of "good" and "bad". For instance, terms correlated with "good" include useful, sound, morally excellent, kind, benevolent, pleasant, advantageous, skilled, competent,

clever, adequate, sufficient, satisfactory, desirable, and proper. Conversely, terms linked with "bad" encompass defective, inferior, worthless, incorrect, faulty, evil, noxious, ill, wicked, morally depraved, vicious, injurious, dangerous, hurtful, disagreeable, troublesome, painful, unpleasant, etc. For example, the definition of the negative evaluative idiom "out of your mind" – "1) having lost control of your mental faculties; insane; 2) used to express a belief in someone's foolishness or mental turmoil; 3) suffering from the specified condition to a very high degree" [The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, 2004, p. 189] contains four negative evaluative lexemes.

In addition, we have also considered the location of evaluative vocabulary – whether it appears within the lexical structure of the idiom itself or solely in its definition. Consequently, we can identify the most common evaluative indicators present within the composition of evaluatively marked idioms, as well as those found predominantly in their dictionary definitions. For our research, those phraseological units have been selected which contain: a) positive connotations both in their composition and dictionary definition ("have something on good authority" - "have ascertained something from a reliable source" [The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, 2004, p. 11]); b) positive connotations in their dictionary definition alone ("be all that" – "be very <u>attractive</u> or <u>good</u>" [The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, 2004, p. 6]); c) negative connotations and expressions of negation ("be nobody's/<u>no</u> man's <u>fool</u>" – "be a <u>wise</u> and/ or <u>astute</u> person; <u>not be</u> easily deceived or exploited by anyone" [The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, 2004, p. 52]).

The idioms possessing negative connotations, in their turn, include: a) the ones in both their composition and dictionary definition ("a <u>bad</u> quarter of an hour" – "a short but very <u>unpleasant</u> period of time; an <u>unnerving</u> experience" [The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, 2004, p. 13]); b) in their dictionary definition alone ("done for" – "in a situation so <u>bad</u> that it is impossible to get out of it" [The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, 2004, p. 83]); c) both having positive connotations and expressions of negation ("not as black as you are painted" – "<u>not as bad</u> as you are said to be" [The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms, 2004, p. 27]).

Depending on the nature of the evaluative context involving idioms, various types of evaluations can be identified in media discourse:

a) rational evaluation, which arises from an objective stance towards the object of reality, typically through logical judgments (call a spade a spade, cut to the chase, face the facts), for example: "Let's call a spade a spade: this is illegal," he said of the prime minister's plans" [The Guardian, 2022]. It involves assessing something based on factual or reasoned criteria.

b) emotional evaluation, which expresses feelings or the subjective attitude of the evaluator towards the object of evaluation (hit close to home, pull at the heart, tug at the heartstrings), for example: "This is a cause close to my heart that has hit close to home," Morrison said ahead of the campaign launch" [The Guardian, 2019]. This evaluation often resides within the connotative semantics of idioms, reflecting personal or emotive responses.

c) rational-emotional evaluation, which emerges when both rational judgments and emotional responses are intricately intertwined (on the fence, speak to the heart and mind, strike a chord, walk a tightrope), for example: "So far, the White House has managed to walk this tightrope, but it's almost certain to grow harder the longer the war goes on, as Volodymyr Zelenskiy's impassioned address to the US Congress on Wednesday demonstrated" [The Guardian, 2022]. Such evaluation occurs when assessments are not purely logical or purely emotional but blend both aspects, creating a holistic perspective that combines reasoned analysis with affective reactions.

The evaluation structure is composed of the following explicit components: the subject of evaluation, which can be an individual, a segment of society, or society as a whole, from whose perspective the evaluation is expressed; the evaluation itself (evaluative predicate); the object of evaluation, i.e., an object, phenomenon, or person in objective reality; the subject of evaluation (the interlocutor); the evaluation scale, which includes zones of positive, neutral, or negative values; and a stereotype, perceived in a given language culture as a semiotically significant standard or norm characterized by stability, duration, and national specificity, for instance: "'They hate your guts': Trump attacks media and Democrats at Michigan rally" [The Guardian, 2020]. The idiom hate your guts is an informal and emphatic way of expressing intense dislike or hatred for someone. In the context of the evaluation structure, its subject is the person or group expressing the hatred, which, in this case, is implied to be Trump or his supporters. The object of evaluation is the target of this hatred, referring to the media and Democrats. The evaluation itself, or evaluative predicate, is the strong negative assessment conveyed through the phrase hate your guts. This idiom falls into the negative zone of the evaluation scale, indicating extreme aversion. The stereotype in this context is the cultural understanding that "hating someone's guts" is a hyperbolic and vivid way to express intense dislike. This stereotype is recognized for its emotional intensity and dramatic connotation. Therefore, the idiom communicates a profound and visceral level of animosity, suggesting that the feelings of dislike are deep-rooted and vehement.

The idiom *pull the plug on smth*. in the following example expresses a scenario where Donald Trump might abruptly cease support or take actions that could adversely affect Kyiv, highlighting the abruptness and

potential severity of such a decision: "If victorious, Putin fan Donald Trump may try to impose a quick deal – and pull the plug on Kyiv" [The Guardian, 2023]. The subject of evaluation is Donald Trump, specifically his potential actions if he wins. The object of evaluation is metonymical Kyiv, indicating it as the target or recipient of the action, referring to support or aid. The evaluative predicate is "pull the plug on", emphasizing the action of abruptly stopping or terminating. This falls into the negative zone of the evaluation scale, suggesting a decision perceived as detrimental or disadvantageous. The stereotype associated with the given idiom is its portrayal as a decisive and often harsh action, reflecting finality and potentially severe consequences for the affected party.

The evaluation scale categorizes the evaluative predicates used in the idiomatic expressions according to their emotional or judgmental intensity. It classifies these predicates into zones of positive, neutral, or negative evaluations based on their connotation and context within the sentences. The statistical analysis of idioms based on their evaluation scale is presented in Figure 1.

Expressions classified as positive convey favorable assessments, admiration, or positive attributes towards the subject or object, often indicating approval, satisfaction, or beneficial aspects. These idioms account for 16% of the analyzed expressions, for example: "The pandemic's silver lining? Finding time for a special family reunion" [The Guardian, 2020]. The idiom *silver lining* is used to emphasize a positive outcome or benefit arising from a challenging situation (the pandemic). Despite the difficulties caused by the pandemic, the phrase suggests that one positive aspect has been the opportunity to spend time with family members, which is seen as a favorable and cherished experience. Thus, the idiom falls within the positive assessment category identified in the analysis.

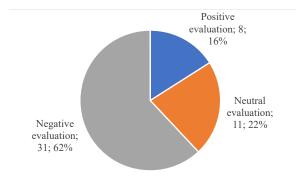


Fig. 1. Evaluation scale of idioms in English media discourse

Negative idioms, making up the majority of the sample (62%), express unfavorable assessments, criticism, or intense dislike towards the subject or

object. These expressions typically denote disapproval, dissatisfaction, or undesirable qualities, for example: "Apart from anything else, with the present Conservative government an international laughing stock, it is a remarkable achievement to have become such a self-destructive opposition" [The Guardian, 2019]. Laughing stock is a negative idiom that criticizes the present Conservative government. It suggests that the government is widely ridiculed or not taken seriously on the international stage, indicating a strong negative evaluation. This expression reflects disapproval and criticism, aligning with the negative assessment category.

Neutral idioms (22% of the analyzed expressions) do not inherently convey positive or negative judgments. They are factual, descriptive, or comparative in nature, lacking strong emotional or evaluative connotations, for instance: "Being diagnosed with bowel cancer in my mid-30s forced me to cross the thin line between good health and illness we often remain ignorant of until we're much older" [The Guardian, 2023]. Here the idiom describes a transition from one state to another (good health to illness) without explicitly conveying a positive or negative evaluation. Instead, it presents a factual comparison, illustrating a shift in health status without emotional overtones.

The connotative meanings of idioms can also be context-dependent, varying according to the situation in which they are used. The context can influence whether an idiom is interpreted positively, negatively, humorously, or ironically. In the article discussing the House of Lords and political influence, the idiom money talks is used to evaluate the impact of financial wealth on the political sphere, particularly within the context of peerage nominations: "Money talks, and nowhere more so than in the Lords" [The Guardian, 2022]. Here, the subject of evaluation is the pervasive influence of money, while the object pertains to the power and access it affords in political decision-making. The evaluative predicate "money talks" sharply critiques this phenomenon, implying that financial resources wield significant influence over political appointments and policies. The idiom in question in the provided context falls into the negative zone of the evaluation scale. It suggests a critical viewpoint that sees financial influence as potentially undermining democratic principles, leading to concerns about fairness, transparency, and accountability.

Depending on the speaker's/writer's sociocultural knowledge, axiological idioms can be grouped into the following types of evaluations, based on evaluation categories elaborated by T.A. Kosmeda [Космеда, 2000]:

1) Idioms that contain assessments related to human senses (catch someone's eye, leave a bad taste in one's mouth, fall on deaf ears, turn a blind eye, to smell fishy, touch and go), e.g.: "The claimants allege

that he knew News Corp's public denial was false "or at the very least <u>turned a blind eye</u> to its veracity and that of the allegations" [The Guardian, 2024].

"Writing in the Guardian, Blunkett, who served as home secretary under Tony Blair, has said the government's plans to use the bill to prevent peaceful protests would "leave a bad taste in the mouths of British people who value tolerance, democracy and open debate" [The Guardian, 2021].

2) Idioms reflecting assessments related to a person's intelligence (a wise man of Gotham, a sandwich short of a picnic, bright spark, smart as a whip, not the sharpest tool in the shed, bright as a button, sharp cookie, playing the fool), for example: "Thin and appearing stooped through scoliosis, Marilyn's apparent physical frailty belied a mind as smart as a whip" [The Guardian, 2022].

"The clown king: how Boris Johnson made it by playing the fool" [The Guardian, 2021].

- 3) Idioms denoting assessment of a person's actions based on the need for and usefulness to society (drop the ball, miss the boat, pull one's weight, carry one's weight, do one's bit, pitch in, shoulder the burden, bear the brunt, hold up one's end, pull one's own weight, put one's shoulder to the wheel, do one's share), for instance: "The world's poorest are bearing the brunt of climate change poverty, migration, hunger, gender inequality and ever more scarce resources despite having done the least to cause it," he said" [The Guardian, 2022].
- 4) Idioms denoting social assessment, which characterize the norms of human behavior in society, attitude to social values (a black sheep, a pillar of society, go with the flow, in the same boat, toe the line), for example: "The president's attack on every pillar of society jeopardises the US's continued prosperity and ability to function as a democracy" [The Guardian, 2019].
- 5) Idioms expressing moral and ethical assessment, which evaluates the traits of a person related to with the moral principles enshrined in society (actions speak louder than words, a man of his word, good Samaritan, make no bones, practice what you preach) for example: "A confidential document prepared by CT Group, the influential lobbying firm run by Lynton Crosby which advises Boris Johnson, and which I have seen, makes no bones about the defenestrated prime minister's aim to pack the House of Lords" [The Guardian, 2022].
- 6) Idioms reflecting ideological assessment, which indicates the attitude of the object of assessment to the policy legitimized by the society, etc. (bitter pill to swallow, bad news, pile on the agony, etc.), for instance: "Social media is making kids sad and it's bad news for democracy" [The Guardian, 2024].

"Service blunders <u>pile on the agony</u> for UK customers as energy bills rocket" [The Guardian, 2022].

Variations in the idiom structure are considered examples of idiomatic creativity. This is because they go beyond simply rephrasing the standard idiom fulfilling distinct semantic and pragmatic functions in media discourse. Specifically, they personalize and adapt language use to the particular context in which it is spoken, adding stylistic nuances. The author's use of axiological idioms consists in:

1) expansion in the component composition of the idiom: "How many divers will Rishi Sunak need to <u>plumb the murky depths</u> of Nadhim Zahawi's tax affairs?" [The Guardian, 2023].

The original idiom "plumb the depths" is expanded by adding the element "murky", creating a more vivid and context-specific expression. This expanded version adds stylistic flair and better fits the specific context of discussing a thorough investigation in a potentially murky or suspicious situation.

In the following example, adding "so many" quantifies the extent of the action, indicating that numerous relationships have been damaged, not just a few: "People might have doubted that because we had burned so many bridges with our allies and our friends," she told current and former officials attending the event" [The Guardian, 2023]. It serves to personalize and adapt the language for the specific context, adding clarity, emotional weight, and stylistic nuance.

2) ellipsis: "<u>Hats off</u> to Prada's romantic nod to the past in Milan" [The Guardian, 2024].

The ellipsis in the component composition of the idiom "take your hat off" to "hats off" makes the expression more concise and direct, which can be more impactful in certain contexts, such as headlines or brief statements.

3) structural modifications: "It'll be fun to find out Laurie's procedural style – will it be the <u>every-stone-left-unturned</u> approach favoured by his predecessor, Lord Geidt, or maybe the silent despair that engulfed Geidt's predecessor, Alex Allan, who opted to resign when his lengthy investigation finding that Priti Patel had breached the ministerial code was over-ruled by Boris Johnson quickly deciding she hadn't" [The Guardian, 2023].

In the given context, the structure of the idiom is inverted and rephrased as "every-stone-left-unturned approach", turning it into a noun phrase. This modification maintains the original meaning while enhancing the clarity, relevance, and stylistic appeal of the expression.

The analysis of the material shows that all of the above-mentioned ways of authorial transformation of phraseological units contribute to the vivid expression of the axiological assessment (meliorative or pejorative) inherent in these units and are aimed at persuasion, which is achieved by combining two semantic planes through updating the original image or compositional meaning of the idiom.

**Conclusions.** Evaluation expresses the subjective value assigned to an object by the speaker, characterizing it based on its alignment with societal norms, interests, and preferences ingrained in the cultural consciousness. The evaluative structure comprises explicit components: the evaluator (speaker), the evaluative predicate (assessment), the object of evaluation (real-world entity), the evaluated subject (listener), an evaluative scale (ranging from positive to negative with a neutral zone), and a stereotype (established norm or benchmark). The ability to adjust the axiological polarity based on contextual factors and its integration into the language system are guided by the speaker's axiological intentions and the community's validation of such evaluative language. The axiological (meliorative or pejorative) connotations of idioms stem from specific perceptions of reality, assessing their benefit or harm to individuals or society. This axiological dimension is integral to the semantics of idioms, as they aim to encapsulate a person's evaluative stance towards tangible reality.

The **prospects** for further research lie in deeper lexical semantic analysis of emotive idioms in other types of discourse.

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