

## ANIMAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the idiom usage in English, both its functions in sentences and its meaning. It also tries to describe the link between idioms and culture. The data were taken from *Mc Graw Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs* by Richard A. Spears, Ph.D and *A Book of English Idioms* by V.H. Collins. The finding shows that form of idioms are phrase, clause, and sentence. The phrase patterns are Animal Element (AE) + Noun, Adjective + Animal Element (AE), Verb + Animal Element (AE), Animal Element (AE) + Preposition, and Animal Element (AE) + Verb. The idioms functions are as Verb, Adjective, and Noun. The study also finds a relation between idiom and culture. Culture gives effect to the idiom usage.

**Keywords:** Idioms, Animal, Meaning, Culture

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan penggunaan idiom di dalam bahasa Inggris, termasuk fungsi dalam kalimat dan artinya. Penelitian ini juga berusaha untuk menggambarkan hubungan antara idiom dan budaya setempat. Data diperoleh dari *Mc Graw Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs* karangan Richard A. Spears, Ph.D and *A Book of English Idioms* yang ditulis oleh V.H. Collins. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa idiom di dalam bahasa Inggris bisa berbentuk frase, klausa, dan kalimat. Pola frase Unsur Hewan + Kata Benda, Kata Sifat + unsur Hewan, Kata Kerja + Unsur Hewan, Unsur Hewan + Preposisi, dan Unsur Hewan + Kata Kerja. Idiom tersebut dapat berfungsi sebagai Kata Kerja, Kata Sifat, dan Kata Benda. Penelitian ini juga menunjukkan hubungan antara idiom dan budaya setempat. Kebudayannya memberi pengaruh penggunaan idiom.

**Kata Kunci:** Idiom, Hewan, Arti, Budaya

### INTRODUCTION

Communication becomes the most essential part of human life. It can convey human feelings and thought (Keraf, 1986). Language is needed in communication. Language is a symbol system of word sounds (Chaer, 2012). The symbol is in the form of understanding, concept, idea, or thought to be conveyed in the sound form.

Language always changes following the development of the speaker's age and humans as the user. (Parera, 2004). Each language component will always change dynamically starting from the phonology, morphology, syntax, semantic, to pragmatic components. The amount of vocabulary will always increase and develop. One of the vocabulary meaning developments is shifting and changing meaning. Metaphor becomes the biggest and most important phenomenon in the shifting and meaning changing. (Parera, 2004). The main metaphorical structures

are (1) the topic discussed (2) the image or the second topic and (3) the similarity point. Based on the choice of imagery used by language users, the choice of images can be divided into four groups, (1) anthromorphic image metaphors, (2) animal image metaphors, (3) abstract to concrete image metaphors, (4) metaphorical images of synesthesia or sense perception exchange. (Parera, 2004)

The study only discusses animal imagery metaphors. Language speakers are used to describing conditions or reality in their life by using animal metaphors. The topic is interesting to be discussed because (1) animal is creature around humans so the meaning of metaphor relationship occurs can be predicted or imagined and (2) the idiom is related to local culture.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Idioms

Idioms are structural patterns deviating from the rules of common language, usually in the form of phrases, while the meaning cannot be explained logically or grammatically by only relying on the meanings shaping them (Keraf, 1986). Idioms are lexical intact, so if they are changed they will damage their unity. Crsytal (1980) states that idioms are a series of words functioning as a unit because the meaning cannot be inferred semantically from each of the constituent elements and syntactically the series of words that the structure is fixed or unchanged. It can be concluded that the idiom elements cannot be changed separately without losing their idiomatic meaning.

### Word Class

1. Verb is a word class usually functioning as predicate; in some other languages verbs have morphological characteristics such as time, aspect, persona, or number. Most verbs represent the semantic elements of an action, state, or process (Kridalaksana, 2009).
2. Adjective is a word explaining a noun. In Bahasa, the characteristic is being able to join with 'no' and particles 'more', 'very' and so on. Whereas in English it is characterized by its ability to join with '{-er}', '{-est}', or 'more' and 'most' (Kridalaksana, 2009).
3. A noun is a word class of words usually functioning as a subject or an object of a clause (Kridalaksana, 2009). It often matches to people, things, or other things that are embedded in nature outside of language. In English it is marked with the possibility to join the plural suffix {-s} or {es} and others. The example of the plural form 'flowers'

### Previous Studies

Studies related to idioms have been carried out by Susanti (2014) 'English Idioms with Human Body Parts and Its Indonesian equivalent'. In her thesis Susanti explained a lot of idiomatic relations between English and Bahasa in a contrastive manner. Hartati (2002) in her thesis entitled 'Idioms in Bahasa' discussed the characteristics of idioms, idiom forms, and idiom functions. Another study was conducted by Suyatno (2012) in his dissertation 'Idioms in Bahasa' in which he described the characteristics of idioms, idiom forms, idiom forming

elements, idiom reference sources, the scope of idiom use, idiom relations with culture and motives for their use, and phenomena the development of idioms in Indonesian.

From the previous researches, none has discussed animal idioms in English. Based on this reason the author conducts a research about animal idioms with the following problems:

1. what is the function of animal idioms in English?
2. what are the forms and formation patterns of animal idioms in English?
3. how is the relationship between the formed idiom and the local culture?

So the purpose of the article is to find out the functions of idiom formations in sentences, describe the forms and patterns of formation of animal-based idioms in English and the relationship of idioms with local culture.

## RESEARCH METHOD

Data collection was conducted through the following steps:

1. reading the data source repeatedly.
2. taking note of all the animal idioms.
3. classifying the elements of language use in the form of idioms, both in the form of phrases, clauses, and sentences and the meanings they declare.

The data was taken from two idiom dictionaries namely *Mc Graw Hill's Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs* by Richard A. Spears, Ph.D and *A Book of English Idioms* by V.H. Collins. The dictionaries were chosen because they provide examples of idioms and their meanings and usage in sentences.

The writer collected animal idioms in the form of phrases, clauses, or sentences. In the analysis, the writer grouped the data based on the word classes such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Furthermore, the existing data were also analyzed based on the form and pattern of their formation. The formation pattern was the constituent components of the idioms. In presenting the data, the writer classified the idioms based on the function and the form, also the pattern of the idiom formation. In the last part, the writer explained the relationship between the idioms formed and the local culture.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Idioms are series of words whose meaning cannot be deduced from its constituent elements. The series of words are in a fixed form and they may consist of two, three, or more words. The series are a meaningful word called construction. Construction is the process and result of grouping language units into meaningful units so the meaningful unity has some degree of freedom (Kridalaksana, 2009).

### A. The Functions of Animal Idioms

A sentence contains main components such as noun and verb and it may contain other components such as prepositions, adverbs, adjectives, and others. Animal idioms in English have different word functions or classes. The functions

are:

### 1. Verb

The idioms functioning as verb include '**duck and cover**' which means 'shelter/take cover'. The example in sentence '*When the gunfire started, we had to duck and cover or get killed*'. The phrase '**chickened out**' means 'go' in '*Ken's chickened out on us so he won't be going with us*'. The phrase '**fish for (sth)**' 'catches something' in the sentence '*We will fish for (birds) today*'. The second phrase after *for* can be replaced by other words as long as the filler is a noun.

### 2. Adjective

The idioms functioning as adjective include '**fat cat**' which means 'rich' in the sentence '*I am not fat cat. I can't even pay my normal bills*'. '**duck soup**' means 'easy / easy' in the sentence '*For Katty, knitting a sweater is duck soup*'. '**for the birds**' means 'ugly / useless / not seductive' in the sentence '*The television program is for the birds*'.

### 3. Noun

The idioms functioning as noun include '**the black sheep of the family**' which means 'family members behave the worst' in the sentence '*Mary is the black sheep of the family. She is always in trouble with the police*'. The idiom '**afraid cat**' means 'coward' in the sentence '*Doesn't be an afraid of cat. Go ahead jump!*' Idiom '**dead duck**' means 'loser / person failed' in the sentence '*If I fail that test, I am a dead duck*'.

## B. The patterns of Animal Idioms

### 1. Idioms in the form of phrases

The study shows that many idioms in the form of phrases found in English idioms. The idioms occur when the idiom form is a syntactic unit consisting of two or more words that do not exceed the subject and predicate boundaries (Kridalaksana, 2009). The phrases were constructed from animal idioms are:

#### a. Animal Element (AE) + Noun

The constructions Animal Element (AE) + Noun can happen in some idioms for example the phrase '**cow juice**' 'milk' in the sentence '*Here is a little cow juice to pour on your cereal*.' The phrase '**cow paste**' 'butter' in the sentence '*Would you kindly pass the cow paste?*' The phrase '**bullshit story**' 'lie' in the sentence '*Don't give me that bull story*.' The phrase '**dog days**' means 'the hottest day of the summer that occurs during July and August' in the sentence '*I hate doing yard work in the dog days*.' 'I don't like working the field on a hot day'. For idiom '**dog days**', the context expression that occurs is the hottest day in a 4 season country. In a tropical season country e.g Indonesia, this idiom cannot be used in daily conversation.

#### b. Adjective + Animal Element (AE)

The study also shows the presence of Adjective + Animal Element (AE) patterns. The pattern is found in the idioms as follows '**fat cat**' which means 'rich' in the

sentence *'I am not fat cat. I can't even pay my normal bills.'* The phrase **'afraid cat'** means 'coward' in the sentence *'Don't be an afraid cat. Go ahead jump!'*

c. Verb + Animal Element (AE)

The Verb + Animal Element (AE) pattern is found in this idiom as follows **'turn turtle'** meaning 'reversed' in the sentence *'The sailboat turned turtle, but the sailors only got wet.'*

d. Animal Element (AE) + Preposition

There are English idioms patterned Animal Element (AE) + Prepositions. Prepositions are words that lie before nouns or pronouns to explain their relationship with other words in a sentence (Yates, 1999). In English there are several types of prepositions such as down, out, over, above, below, and others. There are two kind phrases in the AE + Preposition. The phrase **'duck down'** means 'ducking' in the sentence *'He ducked down when he heard the gunshot.'* The second phrase is **'duck out'** meaning 'out' in the sentence *'She ducked out of the theater during the intermission.'* For the third idiom is the phrase **'chickened out on'** meaning 'go' in the sentence *'Ken's sentence chickened out on us so he won't be going with us.'*

e. Animal Element (AE) + Verb

The Animal Element (AE) + Verb pattern is in the **'duck and cover'** idiom 'shelter' in the data *'When the gunfire started, we had to duck and cover or get killed.'* There is a conjunction 'and' in this idiom.

## 2. Idioms in the form of Clauses

A clause is a grammatical unit in the form of a group of words consisting of at least a subject and a predicate, and has the potential to be a sentence. (Kridalaksana, 2009). From the data found there are some idioms having this pattern such as **'back the wrong horse'** meaning 'supporting a loser' in the sentence *'I don't want to back the wrong horse, but it seems to me that Jed is the best candidate'*. Another example is **'keep the wolf from the door'** meaning 'hold hunger' in the sentence *'I don't make a lot of money, just enough to keep the wolf from the door.'*; the clause **'live a dog's life'** meaning 'life is lacking' in the sentence *'I'm tired to live a dog's life'*, The clause **'threw to the wolves'** meaning 'sacrifice' in the sentence *'She threw to the wolves for her family.'* Another clause-shaped idiom is **'to catch turtle in a jar'** meaning 'to get something easily' in the sentence *'She got the winning is like to catch turtle in a jar.'*

## 3. Idioms in the form of Sentence

Sentence is a grammatical construction consisting of one or more clauses arranged according to a certain pattern, and can stand alone as a single unit; a language unit that is relatively independent, has a final intonation pattern and actually consists of clauses. (Kridalaksana, 2009). The idioms formed are *'I did not expect to see you studying at the library at this hour of the morning. The early bird catches the worm, huh?'* means 'I didn't expect you to study at the

library this early. You're very diligent, huh? ‘

Information:

The translation of *the early bird catches the worm* is that if you wake up early and work in the morning, you will be successful. This phrase is commonly used to refer to people who are diligent at work.

*A cat in gloves catches no mice. Tell her that you need the money.*

‘Talk directly. Explain to him that you need the money. ‘

Information:

The translation of *a cat in gloves catches no mice* is sometimes you cannot get what you want to get by behaving politely. This expression is used when people hide their feelings or opinions and hope others can understand. The reality is that the person expected does not feel or does not understand what is expected.

Now that *the cat is out the bag*, there is no sense in pretending we do not know what's really happening.

Information:

The translation of *the cat is out the bag* is a secret that has become public consumption. Here to relate to the context of the sentence, the speaker does not need to change to the language of the conversation because the contextual usage is the same as the two previous examples which must be changed to the language of the conversation because the original meaning of the idioms is very formal.

### C. The Relation between Idioms and Culture

Both the lexicons and metaphors growing in the community will not be separated from culture because culture and environment are the inspiration for the birth of the utterances. The opinion appeared from the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Ahearn, 2012). Wierzbicka (1997) also states that the word reflects and tells the characteristics of the way of life and the way of thinking of its speakers. For example the metaphor ‘white as cotton’ and ‘as white snow’, the two metaphors refer to the same thing which is very white but the fact is different. In Western societies who know snow will use snow as an expression, but this does not apply to Indonesians who are geographically climate-free. Below, the discussion explain about the relation between idioms having animal elements in English and the local culture. The culture affects the frequency or number of idioms formed.

#### 1. Dog

The data shows that dog idioms has the most frequent usage. In Western culture, dog becomes a component that cannot be separated from the westerner’s life. Dog is not just pets but it becomes part of the family. In Western films, it is very common to watch dog becomes the main character loved by their owners. This phenomenon is slightly different from Indonesian culture that does not treat dogs like that, although there are some people who do that. It's very rare to see dog as the main character in a film because dog is only as a pet.

The concept of culture treating dog as an essential part of life and dog becomes pet almost in every home in Western culture makes the dog-style idioms quite common, for example:

NO	IDIOMS	MEANING
1.	<i>A dog in the manger</i>	Introvert
2.	<i>A dog's life</i>	Unpleasant situation
3.	<i>Go to the dogs</i>	Sad ending

The data shows the concept of a dog which is usually a friend, but this expression arises because of the influence of content in the Bible. It says that "*Give not that is holy unto the dogs neither cast you your pearls before swine. "Be aware of dogs, beware of evil workers.*" The contents of the quoted text show that a dog becomes dirty creatures and despicable creatures. This statement is opposite to the concept of a dog known as a beautiful and friendly animal.

## 2. Cat

The frequency of occurrence of idioms containing the word 'cat' is quite frequent since in Western culture, cat is the second choice after dog when people want to keep animals. Based on the concept of Western culture, a dog and a cat have never lived harmoniously, so Westerners to keep animals, must choose between dogs and cats. Since cat is also a part of life and animal that is often in the environment of Western speakers, cat appears quite frequently. For example:

NO	IDIOMS	MEANING
1	<i>A cat and dog life</i>	Inharmonic situation
2	<i>Not room to swing a cat</i>	Small room
3	<i>Let the cat out of the bag</i>	Open a secret

## 3. Horse

The term 'cowboy' is referred to one of the works of Westerners in ancient times. The character who rode a horse and a gun always in the hand, sometimes carrying a rope to ensnare opponents who are riding other horses. So it is quite natural if idioms containing the word horse are found a lot. For example:

NO	IDIOMS	MEANING
1	<i>Look a gift horse in the mouth</i>	Look at in detail
2	<i>Straight from the horse mouth</i>	Trustable information
3	<i>Ride the high horse</i>	Such a superior behavior

Idiom number 2 was appeared from horse racing because it is believed that a horse has a sharp intuition in horse racing is needed to win the game. Idiom no 3 indicates that a horse becomes a superior animal in ancient times. The statement is true because in ancient times in Western culture, people who owned horses were

categorized as rich people.

#### 4. Bird

In addition to dog and cat, there are also many idioms using bird or bird elements since bird is an element of Western culture. The fact does not only apply to many idioms, songs and poems that use birds. In the marriage culture of Western, they use a pair of pigeons later released together during the wedding ceremony.

NO	IDIOMS	MEANING
1	<i>Kill two birds with one stone</i>	Do many things at one time
2	<i>A little bird told me</i>	Not trustable information (the source is unclear)

There is a similarity in Bahasa for the idiom '*Kill two birds with one stone*' corresponds to '*Once rowing two three islands is exceeded*'. The meaning of two idioms stated are the same, doing one job by getting different results, here are two striking cultures. English idioms use the word 'birds' but Indonesian idioms use the words 'paddling and islands'. Indonesia is a maritime country so using idioms related to maritime is something natural. For the second idiom, '*a little bird told me*' and '*kabar burung*' in Bahasa, the two idioms use the same referent and have the same meaning.

#### 5. Lion

Lion in Western culture is seen as dangerous animal so idioms containing the word 'lion' relate to dangerous or bad situations. For example:

NO	IDIOMS	MEANING
1	<i>A lion in the path</i>	Dangerous obstacle
2	<i>Put one's head in the lion's mouth</i>	Taking high risk

The idiom of '*put one's head in the lion's mouth*' will be different from the idiom in Bahasa '*enter into the lion's den*' but close to the meaning of '*enter into the crocodile's mouth*'. Both of the idioms have the same referent which is mouth, but they use two different animals which are lion and crocodile. The Indonesian idiom uses the word 'crocodile' because in Indonesia it is more common to encounter crocodiles which is geographically a country that has many rivers that used to be likely to have many crocodiles.

#### 6. Goat

The idioms using the word 'goat' e.g '*separate the sheep from the goats*' meaning 'to differentiate' was inspired by the Bible (Matthew, 25, 32). In Western culture, goats and sheep are animals that have different levels. Western culture treats sheep higher than goats. This is because the majority of Westerners are Christians, where the word lamb is often found in their holy books.



### 7. Sheep

The word 'sheep' is a potential animal in English idiom since sheep becomes part of Westerners lives. Many food products derived from sheep and Westerners consume the products almost every day. Religion also influences it because the majority is Christian since sheep become animal often appearing in the Bible. For example '*cast sheep's eyes*', which means 'a look of shame'.

### 8. Bull

The idiom a '*red rag to a bull*' meaning 'causing people to get angry' is very closely related to one of the Western's favorite shows, bullfighting or matador. In a bull match, a bull is known to get angry easily when it sees a red cloth.

### 9. Donkey

The idiom '*donkey-work*' meaning 'doing something trivial and only requires modest abilities', has something in common with the Indonesian seeing a donkey as stupid animal as in the phrase 'brained donkey' meaning 'stupid'.

### 10. Wolf

An idiom using the word 'wolf' has the same concept as an idiom using the word 'lion'. Both connote dangerous things since in Western culture these two animals are known as animal attacking human frequently. So the idiom '*throw to the wolves*' meaning 'sacrifice yourself' is something natural. Idioms are also logical as if we throw food or feed animals to animals.

### 11. Turtle

An idiom contains the word 'turtle' as in '*turned turtle*' meaning 'slow', is similar to Indonesian culture that sees a turtle as a slow animal. In Indonesia there is the phrase "*Don't walk like a turtle*" implying 'walking very slowly'.

### 12. Snail

Idiom '*snail's pace*' means 'slow'. The idiom is similar to Indonesian culture viewing a snail as a slow animal. In Indonesian culture, there is a race between snail and other animals won by the snail. The story also found in Western culture entitled 'snail as the winner'.

### 13. Worm

The idiom '*even a worm will turn*' meaning 'definitely refuse' is funny to Westerners because naturally a worm never turn. The expression is a confirmation to something that must be rejected. A worms is also considered a disgusting animal. The analogy is a disgusting animal will refuse so it will happen to human.

### 14. Snake

The idiom '*scotch the snake*' meaning 'to destroy the cause of the problem' was

inspired by Macbeth (III, 1, 13) in which in a conversation with Banquo, Macbeth said “We have scorched the snake not killed it”. So the idiom does not only come from the environment, but also from literature such as short stories, drama scripts, or novels that developed in Western societies.

### 15. Pig

The word ‘pig’ appears in the idiom ‘*pig in a poke*’. In Indonesian, there is a similarity that is ‘do not buy cats in a sack’. Both of the idioms contain the same meaning ‘don’t buy indefinite thing’ even though the referents are different ‘cats’ and ‘pigs’. It is influenced by the culture in which cat is common animal in Indonesia compared to pig, which is common for Westerners.

### 16. Crocodile

The idiom ‘crocodile tears’ means ‘not sincere’. There is a shifting phenomenon both in Western and Indonesian cultures. In fact, crocodile is a loyal creature because it only has one partner for life.

### 17. Mice

The idiom ‘*cat in gloves catches no mice*’ means ‘take direct action’ or the original translation is ‘sometimes you can’t get what you want by behaving politely’. The idiom was born from scientific fact that rat is the enemies of cat.

### 18. Cow

The idiom ‘*cow paste*’ means butter. The idiom is often used at breakfast. It is common in Western culture to have breakfast only with bread and butter.

### 19. Monkey

The idiom ‘*get one’s monkey up*’ means ‘do something with enthusiasm’. The idiom’s inspiration comes from the Amazon jungle where there are lots of clay monkeys hanging and swinging from one tree to another. One Western culture is hunting in the forest and often Westerners find animals like monkeys.

### 20. Chicken

Idiom ‘*chicken out*’ means ‘run away (wildly)’. The implication is chickens are wild animals, and when they are locked up and out of cages they will be difficult to catch. The idiom is often used to refer to naughty children who like to play truant during class hours in Western country schools.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that animal-idioms function as verbs, adjectives, and nouns. Idioms functioning as adjectives are expressed in the form of objects or nouns unlike verbs and nouns whose constituent elements are verbs and nouns. Animal-style idioms form as phrases, clauses, and sentences. Animal-shaped idioms in the form of phrases have AE + Prep, AE+ Noun, Adjective + AE, AE+ Verb, and

Verb + AE patterns. There are at least 20 types of animals that are often used in idioms, such as dog, cat, horse, bird, lion, goat, sheep, snail, bull, donkey, wolf, turtle, worm, snake, pig, crocodile, mice, cow, monkey, and chicken.

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