ANIMAL IDIOMS IN ENGLISH

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Abstract: The English language is rich in idioms, which are frequently used by the natives in their daily conversation.
Idioms are fixed expressions, not literal, whose meaning is not deductible from the individual words they contains. Thus, I consider the aim of this idiom study to be an useful attempt of explaining the meaning of some non-literal expressions, namely idioms, whose meaning cannot be predicted by knowing what each of its parts mean. Idioms come up very frequently not only in spoken, but also in written English. Some idioms are very common in everyday conversation, while others are not that much used on a daily basis. Idioms, as well as proverbs, are considered to be more complex than than literal language.

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The term "idiom" is an expression whose meaning should not be taken literally, because they are not easy to learn or understand by the ones whose mother tongue is not English. However, an idiom can have a literal meaning in a certain situation and a different idiomatic meaning in another.

Idioms, as well as proverbs, are considered to be more complex than than literal language. Many learners of English as a foreign language, find themselves in "deep water" when they have to deal with idioms, because these are not easy to understand due to their metaphorical meanings. Students need to learn the differences between the literal and the figurative meanings of animal-themed idioms.

In other words, if students wish to speak English fluently, it is necessary for them to learn idioms in order to achieve better communicative skills. Personally, I consider animal related idioms to be easier to master by learners as compared to other idioms which have less known entities.

Despite the fact that both the English and Romanian languages have a substantial number of animal related idioms, the great majority have different meanings in each language. The meaning of these idiomatic expressions is related to animal symbolism.

In this paper I share some animal related idioms, which are very commonly used by natives.

In addition to the definition of each idiom, there will also be example sentences to ease the understanding of these common idiomatic expressions.

Learning a foreign language is not only about familiarizing with the meaning of each word, but also about learning to use common idioms and expressions in order to sound more native.The idioms analyzed in this paper include animal, bird and insect idioms.

In short, the focus of this paper will be to analyze some of the commonly named „animal idioms". As the use of similes appears to be very common among „animal idioms" in English, this will be the first category of idioms presented is this paper.

I will begin with the common *„as...as"* category of animal idioms/ animal similes, with the following examples:

As blind as a bat . This idiom either refers to someone who refuses to notice an obvious thing, or to someone who is unable to see at all (literal meaning).

Example: Alice is as blind as a bat without her glasses.

As busy as a bee. To be moving about quickly doing many things.

Example: I can't come with you to the theatre, I am as busy as a bee with schoolwork this month.

As fat as a pig. We say this about someone who is exceptionally fat or obese.

Example: If you keep eating junk food, you will soon become as fat as a pig.

As free as a bird. This idiom refers to someone who is not restrained by anything, someone without obligations; another meaning is that of being happy and untroubled.

Example: Once she graduated from college, Donna felt as free as a bird.

As graceful as a swan.

Example: You must be really proud of your daughter: she was as graceful as a swan on the stage.

As happy as a clam. To be very happy.

Example: Since early childhood, Ann was as happy as a clam during winter holidays.

As hungry as a bear. To be very hungry.

Example: I skipped lunch today so I am as hungry as a a bear.

As mad as a hornet. If someone is as mad as a hornet, they are very angry, full of rage.

Example: My brother was as mad as a hornet last night because everyone in the family forgot about his birthday.

As mad as a loon. It refers to someone whose behaviour is very strange or silly.

Example: He is not to be trusted with such a seroius matter, he seems to be as mad as a loon.

As proud as a peacock. Someone who is as proud as a peacock is extremely proud.

Example: My father returned from his fishing trip as proud as a peacock.

As quiet as a mouse. In a silent and gentle way, making absolutely no noise.

Example: I want to go to bed early tonight, so if you come home late at , please be as quiet as a mouse.

As red as a lobster. Bright red in colour, especially from a bad sunburn.

Example: I told you to use sunscreen: you are as red as a lobster!

As sick as a dog. This idiom is used to refer to an ill person, vomiting a lot.

Example: I do not know what was wrong with the food you ordered last night, but I was as sick as a dog this morning.

As sick as a parrot. Thoroughly displeased, disappointed, or depressed.

Example: Jim was sick as a parrot when he found out that he had lost the game.

As silly as a goose. Calling someone a silly goose, means that you think they are particularly foolish, silly or frivolous.

Example: My boyfriend seems as silly as a goose when he dresses up as a clown.

As sly as a fox. To be exceptionally clever and shrewd, especially in devious ways.

Example: She turned out to be as sly as a fox, getting what she wants at all costs.

As strong as a horse. This idiom refers to a person who is very physically fit, having great physical strength and endurance.

Example: He is always working out, no wonder he is as strong as a horse.

As stubborn as a mule. Someone who is unwilling to listen to reason or change his mind.

Example: I bet you won't make him change his mind, he is as stubborn as a mule.

As ugly as a toad. This is used to indicate that a person is extremely unattractive or visually displeasing.

Example: I realize now why my best friend kept her having a new boyfriend secret, he is as ugly as a toad.

As weak as a kitten. We use this idiom to refer to someone who is especially weak, vulnerable and completely unable to defend himself/herself.

Example: After her surgery, my grandmother felt as weak as a kitten.

As wise as an owl. Exceptionally wise, descerning, or sound in judgement. In lots of myths, owls were associated with wisdom.

Example: Alfred has a lot of experience in this field, he is very clever and as wise as an owl.

Another category of animal-themed idioms analyzed is the "*like*…" category:

A grin like a Cheshire cat. To have a big smile on your face. The term was popularized by the character in Lewis Caroll's "Alice 's Adventures in Wonderland".

Example: After winning the bet, Mary couldn't help grinning like a Cheshire cat.

Drink like a fish. We use the phrase "drink like a fish" when discussing someone's tendency toward consuming too much alcohol.

Example: My new colleague drinks like a fish when he leaves the office.

Drop like flies. If people are dropping like flies, they are getting ill or dying in large numbers.

Example: Because of the heat wave, people were dropping like flies.

Eat like a bird. To only be able to eat small amounts of food.

Example: My little sister is very thin because she has been eating like a bird since early childhood.

Eat like a horse. To eat a lot, far more than the average person.

Example: No wonder that our food supplies are gone, Tom always eats like a horse.

Fight like cat and dog. To have angry arguments all the time or in a very forceful and angry way. Also refers to violent and jealous disagreements between people who are not on good terms.

Example: My siblings and I used to fight like cats and dogs when we were young.

Like a bear with a sore head. To be in a bad mood that causes you to treat other people badly and complain a lot.

Example: It seems like you do not sleep very well lately. Every morning you are like a bear with a sore head.

Like a bull in a china shop. If someone is like a bull in a china shop, they are very careless in the way that they move or behave.

Example: Your friend is like a bull in a china shop, he knocked over the chair and then over the vase on the table.

Like a cat on a hot tin roof. To be so nervous or anxious that you cannot keep still or keep your attention on one thing.

Example: Martha was pacing like a cat on a hot tin roof while she was waiting for the exam results.

Like a deer/rabbit caught in the headlights. To be visibly startled and frozen in fear.

Example: Since the accident, Sam is like a deer caught in the headlights each time she must cross the street.

Like a dog with two tails. This is used to say that someone is very happy about something.

Example: If he gets promoted, John will be like a dog with two tails.

Like a drowned rat. To look very wet and uncomfortable.

Example: After running the marathon, Jim was looking like a drowned rat.

Like a fish out of water. To feel uncomfortable because you feel you do not belong in a place or situation.

Example: When I first met my boyfriend's family I felt like a fish out of water.

Like a fly in the ointment. A single thing or person that is spoiling a situation that could have been very positive or enjoyable.

Example: I like my new school very much but there is a fly in the ointment: it is too far from home.

Like herding cats. This idiom is used to say that trying to control or organize a group of people is difficult.

Example: I find trying to convince my children to eat vegetables to be like herding cats.

Like a lamb to the slaughter. Used when someone is going to do something dangerous, but they do not realize it or have no choice.

Example: The new employee walked into the meeting like a lamb to the slaughter.

Like a moth to a flame. If a person is attracted to someone or something "like a moth to a flame", they are strongly attracted to them.

Example: The beauty of the actress drew the men like a moth to a flame.

Like a red rag to a bull. Very likely to make someone angry or upset.

Example: If your sister finds out you will be late to her party, it will be like a red rag to a bull.

Like a sitting duck. Someone who is easy to attack or easy to cheat.

Example: I felt like a sitting duck waiting for you in that bad neighborhood.

Like shooting fish in a barrel. Very easy to catch or trick. This is a fun expression that creates a whimsical mental picture.

Example: After studying very hard, the exam was like shooting fish in a barrel.

Like the cat that got the cream. Looking particularly self-satisfied, often to the annoyance of others.

Example: After winning the big prize, Joshua felt like the cat that got the cream.

Like turkeys voting for Christmas. Said of people who choose or accept a situation that is not in their interest or will be directly harmful to them. Turkeys are often prepared for a Christmas meal.

Example: Accepting the manager's proposal of working longer hours we would be like turkeys voting for Christmas.

Packed like sardines. To be crowded tightly together in a small space.

Example: We were packed like sardines in the school bus this morning.

Running around like a headless chicken. Doing a lot of things at the same time without planning, in a disorganized manner.

Example: My brother was worried that he would not get the chores done on time that he was running around like a headless chicken.

Watching like a hawk. It means to watch someone all the time, usually to make sure they do not do something wrong or misbehave. Children often hear this idiom from a parent or other caregiver.

Example: It is very common for parents to watch their kids like a hawk.

Work like a dog. To work very hard.

Example: Martin has been working like a dog to get the job done.

Overall, I hope that this research attempt can serve as a stimulant for further idiom related studies. Idiom studies can be such meaningful attempts to research language and cognition and to make these attempts deliver more results, we need to employ different linguistic theories and perspectives. Students should be aware of the importance of studying English idioms, an important means of enriching communication in every language.

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