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BODY PARTS IN IDIOMS

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Abstract: *Today's English has a general tendency towards a more idiomatic usage. Even educated usage has become more tolerant, so the use of idiomatic expressions increased in frequency. Idioms are, in a very broad sense, metaphorical rather than literal: they are effectively metaphors that have become 'fixed' in language. In some cases, it is fairly easy to see how the idiomatic meaning relates to the literal meaning, in other cases, the literal meaning may make no sense at all.*

The present paper is a study on English idioms which contain words denoting parts of the body. Parallel idioms from Romanian are given in order to exemplify similarities or differences, as well as particularities of some English idioms due to cultural individuality.

Keywords: *idiom, similarity, vocabulary*

If you attempt a comparative study of idioms in different languages, there are several possibilities of grouping them, even within a certain topic, like that of parts of the body.

Quite a few sayings, phrases and idioms have the same or similar form in several different languages, since they can be traced back to a common source:

- a) Greek or Roman mythology; the Bible; widely known tales, fables or anecdotes;
- b) beliefs and superstitions;
- c) experiences of everyday life, practical common sense or the unwritten rules of elementary decency, which must have been pretty much the same everywhere).

In other cases the same idea, action or attitude is expressed in quite a different way in various languages, especially in those which do not have a common origin, a shared cultural background or at least territorial contact.

The third group would be of those idioms which are so typical of a certain

language (in our case, English) that they can be considered unique and matchless.

The present paper deals with idioms that are identical or similar in English and Romanian.

Achilles' heel = the only vulnerable spot in a person or thing that is otherwise strong; a serious or fatal weakness/ fault

R: călcâiul lui Achile

After one's own heart = to like someone because of similar interests

R: a fi pe inima cuiva/ pe placul cuiva

An eye for an eye (and a tooth for a tooth) = retaliation/ retribution in kind, a punishment that is as cruel as the crime

R: ochi pentru ochi, dinte pentru dinte

An eye opener = a surprise; a startling or enlightening experience

R: a deschide ochii asupra a ceva nou/ a vedea cu alți ochi o situație

Armed to the teeth = heavily armed

R: înarmat până-n din□i

Behind one's back = when one is not present

R: pe la spatele cuiva, în lipsa/necuno□tin□a cuiva

Blue blood = having the qualities of being of noble birth

R: a avea sânge albastru

Can't put one's finger on = can't locate immediately, can't find the answer

R: a nu putea pune degetul pe...

Can't see beyond the end of one's nose = limited vision concerning decisions of the future

R: a nu vedea mai departe de propriul nas, a avea ochelari de cal

Crocodile tears = false tears, pretended grief

R: lacrimi de crocodil

Face to face/ eyeball-to-eyeball = confronting each other

R: fa□ă în fa□ă/ochi în ochi

Foul mouth = a user of profanity

R: gură-spurcată

Hand in hand = in close association

R: mână în mână

Hands are tied = restrained from acting

R: a avea mâinile legate

Heart-to-heart = intimate speaking freely and seriously about a private subject

R: de la inimă la inimă, de la suflet la suflet

I could have bitten my tongue off = sorry you said something

R: mai bine-mi mu□cam limba

In one ear and out the other = does not heed or pay attention

R: intră pe o ureche □i iese pe cealaltă

It's in your hands = it is your responsibility

R: este în mâinile tale

On the tip of one's tongue = at the point of telling or recalling

R: a-i sta pe vârful limbii

One foot in the grave = old and decrepit

R: cu un picior în groapă

Over one's dead body = against one's strong opposition

R: (numai) peste cadavrul cuiva

Right-hand man = chief assistant

R: (a fi) mâna dreaptă a cuiva

To (not) lift a finger = not to help in the slightest degree

R: a nu ridica niciun deget pentru...

To be all ears = to listen attentively

R: a fi numai urechi

To be loose-tongued = to talk too much

R: a fi slobod la gură, a fi gură spartă

To be up to one's ears = immersed in, caught in

R: a fi implicat până peste urechi/cap

To break someone's heart = cause great sorrow, disappoint someone

R: a frânge inima cuiva

To breathe down someone's neck = to follow someone closely in pursuit, the action of a superior who is looking for something wrong or watching someone very closely

R: a-i sulfa cuiva în ceafă

To bury one's head in the sand = to refuse to accept facts

R: a-□i băga/ascunde capul în nisip

To catch one's breath = to rest to regain normal breathing

R: a-□i recăpăta suflul/suflarea

To cry on someone's shoulder = to go to someone to talk to about a problem

R: a plânge pe umărul cuiva

to foam/ froth at the mouth = to be very angry

R: a face spume la gură

To force one's hand = make one reveal his plans

R: a for□a mâna cuiva

To get one's hands on = obtain

R: a pune mâna pe...

To get out of hand = become uncontrollable

R: a scăpa din mână

To get through one's head = to understand or believe

R: a băga la cap

To give one's right arm = make a big sacrifice; give something of great value

R: a-□i da mâna dreaptă pentru...

To give someone a hand = help, assistance

R: a da o mână de ajutor

To go to one's head = cause dizziness

R: a i se sui la cap

To have a big mouth = to talk too much

R: a avea gura mare, a avea o gură cât o □ură

To have a sharp tongue = harsh or sarcastic in speech

R: a avea limba ascu□ită

To have an eagle eye = to have an excellent eyesight

R: a avea ochi de vultur



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To have one's back to the wall = in a trap with no way to escape

R: a pune pe cineva cu spatele la zid

To have the heart = to have the courage

R: a avea inimă, a te lăsa inima să...

To jump down someone's throat = suddenly become very angry

R: a sări la gâtul cuiva, a sări în capul cuiva

To keep an eye on = watch closely

R: a fi cu ochii pe...

To keep at arm's length = keep at a distance or away from someone

R: a ține la distanță

To keep one's eyes peeled = to watch carefully

R: a fi cu ochii cât cepele

to lead somebody by the nose = to persuade somebody to do what one wants; control somebody completely; mislead somebody easily

R: a duce/purta de nas pe cineva

To leave a bad taste in one's mouth = the distinctive quality of an experience especially with reference to the emotion that it consists of or arouses

R: a lăsa un gust amar (în gură)

To lose one's head = to become excited, lose one's normal self-control

R: a-și pierde capul

To lose one's mind = to become insane

R: a-și pierde mințile, a o lua razna

To make eyes at = to flirt, to look longingly at

R: a face ochi dulci, a trimite ocheade

To pull a long face = become sullen, dejected, express facially one's disapproval or annoyance

R: a face o față lungă

To put one's shoulder to the wheel = to cooperate, to help

R: a pune umărul la...

To put words into someone's mouth = assume a meaning not intended

R: a pune vorbe în gura cuiva

To put your finger on it = to be specific, to explain

R: a pune degetul pe rană

To save your skin/hide = to protect yourself

R: a-și proteja/salva propria piele

To set foot in = to enter

R: a pune piciorul în...

To shake hands = to clasp hands in greetings

R: a da mâna

to show one's teeth = to show or reveal one's true character or real intentions

R: a-și arăta colții = to show one's fangs

R: a-și da arama pe față = to reveal its/ one's copper

To slip through one's fingers = to get away

R: a-i scăpa prinde degete

To split hairs = to argue over minor matters

R: a despica firul în patru

To stand on one's own feet = to be independent

R: a fi pe picioarele sale

To step on peoples' toes = to offend or antagonize others

R: a călca pe cineva pe bătătură

To take the law into one's own hands = to punish someone without court action

R: a lua legea în propriile mâini

To take the words out of someone's mouth = to say something that someone else was about to say

R: a lua cuiva vorbele din gură

To turn one's back on = to ignore

R: a întoarce spatele cuiva

To turn one's stomach = to cause one to become nauseous

R: a întoarce stomacul pe dos

To turn the other cheek = to permit the repetition of some indignity, blow or attack

R: a întoarce și celălalt obraz

To wash one's hands = to disclaim any responsibility for

R: a se spăla pe mâini de...(o anumită problemă)

Unable to believe one's ears = difficult to believe what one hears

R: nu-i poate crede urechilor

Under one's nose = easily seen or noticed

R: chiar sub nasul cuiva

With open arms = with warm welcome

R: cu bra^șele deschise

Idioms are one of the most difficult parts of the vocabulary of any language because they have unpredictable meanings or collocations and grammar. One of the main difficulties for learners is deciding in which situation it is correct to use an idiom, i.e. the level of style (neutral, informal, slang, taboo, etc. idioms). Learners of English may also have difficulty deciding whether an idiom is natural or appropriate in a certain situation. It is extremely unwise to translate idioms into or from one's native language. One may be lucky that the two languages have the same form and vocabulary, but in most cases the result will be utterly bewildering to the English native speaker – and possibly highly amusing. (Seidl 1988)

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