

**BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG**



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GRADUATION PAPER

**A STUDY ON ENGLISH IDIOMS RELATING TO PEOPLE
DESCRIPTION**

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HAI PHONG - 2010

BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG

Nhiệm vụ đề tài tốt nghiệp

Sinh viên:.....Mã số:.....

Lớp:.....Ngành:.....

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Tên đề tài:

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Nhiệm vụ đề tài

1. Nội dung và các yêu cầu cần giải quyết trong nhiệm vụ đề tài tốt nghiệp
(về lý luận, thực tiễn, các số liệu cần tính toán và các bản vẽ).

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2. Các số liệu cần thiết để thiết kế, tính toán.

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3. Địa điểm thực tập tốt nghiệp.

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Họ và tên:.....

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Họ và tên:.....

Học hàm, học vị:.....

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Yêu cầu phải hoàn thành xong trước ngày 10 tháng 07 năm 2010

Đã nhận nhiệm vụ ĐTTN

Đã giao nhiệm vụ ĐTTN

Sinh viên

Người hướng dẫn

Hải Phòng, ngày tháng năm 2010

HIỆU TRƯỞNG

GS.TS. NGUYỄN Trần Hữu Nghị

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1. Đánh giá chất lượng đề tài tốt nghiệp về các mặt thu thập và phân tích tài liệu, số liệu ban đầu, giá trị lí luận và thực tiễn của đề tài.

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Hai Phong, June 2010

Student

Dao Thi Kim Phuong

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

Nowadays, English is one of the most widely used languages in the world and plays an important role together with the development of society and technologies. English is not only an effective means of communication but also show its progressive effects in many aspects of life. As an English-major student, study on the similarities and differences between the two languages and cultures, English and Vietnamese has been one of my concerns when studying at university. There are many differences between two languages, they are differences in grammar, lexicology, translation, phonetics and so on. However, there still exist plenty of similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese that can be demonstrated through metaphorical meaning especially in literature, idioms expression.

The research of English idioms has been traditionally associated with the study of literature, the use of idioms and is not restricted to this kind of language. A perfect understanding of how idioms are used in daily life language is not only important for English students to improve their vocabulary, but also to understand new and original idioms when we hear and use them in daily life.

But, what the author wants to express here is that idioms are the precious treasure of national languages that is the key to help learners know about nation, as well as custom and culture of each country all over the world. Therefore, it is the motivation to me to study idioms relating people description that have made a deep expression on me for a long time because, the author herself find it so interesting and useful. Most languages make use of idioms but the way individual words used varies from one language to

another and each language has its own system and that they cannot always transfer the metaphorical use of a word from one language to another.

Idioms help learners see the interest, the beauty as well as the cultural color of language which help us use and understand correctly and clearly. The author hopes that learners will understand about idioms and proverbs in English special idioms relating to people description that is also the main reason motivating me to implement this research.

2. Scope of the study

During the researching process, the author sees that English idioms, proverbs and expression about people description are an interesting subject. Idioms and proverbs are a treasure of each country. Because of its immensity, what know about them is very little. Due to time allowance and limited knowledge, the author cannot cover all idioms on these issues, this study only focuses on idioms describing people description, typical idioms about people's appearance, people's moods and people's characters.

3. Aims of the study

Idioms are extremely difficult topic and merely well-understand by foreign English learners and even if native speakers of English who take the idioms and proverbs for granted because when they use idioms, they do not know what they are using them. However, appreciate the idioms associated to attitude and behavior of the speakers. So when they hear foreigners make grammatical or pronunciation mistakes, they are quite willing to accept and understand them, they might not understand what that person means and that leads to a misunderstanding and boring conversation. Therefore, my study is aimed at:

- ❖ Clarifying meanings of English idioms expressing.
- ❖ Helping the learners use right idioms in right situations.

❖ Comparing and contrasting the meaning and usage of some certain English idioms about people description with Vietnamese ones to find the similarities and differences, so that readers can understand more about culture, society, as well as people of these two countries.

4. Methods of the study

In order to study English idioms relating to people description and Vietnamese equivalence better, with a hope that learners could see the role of idioms in life, the following methods are used in the studying process:

- The first is to having discussion with the supervisor, experts and friends.
- Besides, idioms were collected from dictionary and other sources of information to get valuable knowledge for this paper.
- Finally, the author will analyze and compare these idioms.

5. Design of the study

This paper gives a clear and brief organization including three main parts that contribute to an easy understanding and practical benefits gained for readers:

Part 1: Introduction

Part 2: Development

- Chapter 1: Theoretical background on English idioms; some definitions of idioms, how idioms versus compounds, proverbs
- Chapter 2: English idioms describing people. In this chapter, some certain idioms are analyzed according to people's appearance, people's moods and people's characters.
- Chapter 3: Some difficulties for learners of English in studying idioms describing people, suggested solutions and exercises for practice.

Part 3: Conclusion

- Conclusion which summaries and restates the issues mentioned through three chapters above.

PART II: DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER 1: GENERAL THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ON IDIOMS IN ENGLISH

I. An overview of idioms

Before researching in detail the use and the meaning of idioms relating to people description, it is important to understand the history and the use of idioms in daily life. Idioms are considered as special units of each language. If English is not your first language, you should not be upset if you find yourself stumped when you hear something you respect, especially if it is an idiomatic expression. Learning about English idiomatic expressions will not only expose you to these “life lessons”, but it will enrich your command of the English language

Often, they offer advice or suggestions on better ways in which to live or interact with others. For this reason, the cryptic nature of idioms contributes to their depth, and significance. Telling someone to simply “think innovatively” might not be as effective as rehearsing the idiom “put the cart before the horse”

Idioms require a moment of hesitation, to ponder their meaning. Once the underlying message behind an idiom emerges, it causes one to pause and consider the truth behind the saying. The more familiar with idiomatic expressions you become, the more likely you can incorporate them in to your own English writing and speech- should you find an appealing situation in which to use one. They are often impressive and enjoyable to share.

Idioms honestly and exactly reflect history, experience, spiritual value, religious opinion of people.

1. What are idioms?

It is important to recognize that idioms are not only colloquial expression as many people believe. Idioms as a special form of language that carries a large

amount of cultural information, such as history, geography, religious, custom, thinking pattern and so on. They appear in formal style, in slang, in poetry,... To research idioms, first of all, we must understand what an idiom is? This is the old theme that we discuss it. Because to define the idiom exactly is a difficult question. In the definition of idioms, some scholars emphasize on the quantity of structure in idioms. That is to say how many language units to constitute the idioms? Is it except the phrases, words group, and words or sentences also can make up to the idioms? Others emphasize the single meanings of idioms it refers that the idiom's meaning is arbitrary. The idiom's meanings cannot synthesize or cut apart. Different people hold the different opinions on the definition of idioms; they have different local points on the definition of idiom. So we must understand the definition of idioms exactly through the research.

Although we are unlikely to give an ideal definition to the idioms, but we should give a better definition of idioms before the research.

“An idiom is an expression with the following features: It is fixed and is recognized by native speakers. You cannot make up your own; It uses language in a non-literal-metaphorical- way”.

(Jon Wright: Idioms organizer:2000:9)

Idioms are phrases that do not mean exactly what they say. They have "hidden" meanings, like the idiom *"to let the cat out of the bag"* really means *"to tell a secret"*. Idioms are like sayings.

An idioms is a group of words in current usage having a meaning that is not deducible from those of the individual words.

Eg:

“A couch potato”- which means *“someone who sits on a sofa or couch for several hours watching TV”* is an idiom; and *“a big shot”*- means *“an important or influential person”*- is another idiom, in both cases, we would have a hard time to understand the real meaning if we did not already know these idioms

According to *online dictionary Wikipedia*:

“An idiom is an expression whose meaning is not compositional – that is whose meaning does not follow from the meaning of which it is composed”

Idioms are also defined as:

“Idiom is a set expression of two or more words that means something other than the literal meanings of its individual words”

(Oxford advanced learner’s dictionary:2000:564)

Eg: *Give a clown your finger and he will take your hand*

Fortune favors the brave

Twiddle one’s thumbs

There are many definitions of idiom in our society. In short, the idioms consist of set phrases and short sentences, which are peculiar to the language in question and steeped in the national and religion, culture and ideas, thus being colorful, forcible and thought – provoking. Strictly speaking, idioms are expressions that are not readily understandable from their literal meanings of individual constituents. In a broad sense, idioms may include colloquialism, catchphrases, slang expressions, proverbs and so on.

2. Some common features of idioms

There are many different definitions of idioms; however, we will find some similarities between them:

Structurally, an idiom is an multiword expression. Individual components of an idiom can often be inflected in the same way individual words in a phrase can be inflected. This inflection usually follows the same pattern of inflection as the idiom’s literal counterpart:

Eg: *jump down one’s throat*

He jumps my throat

➤ An idiom behaves as a single semantic unit

+) It tends to have some measures of internal cohesion such that it can often be replaced by a literal counterpart that is made up of a single word.

Eg: *walk all over someone = frighten*

+) It resists interruption by other words whether they are semantically compatible or not

Eg: *pull one's leg*

+) It resists reordering of its component parts

➤ An idiom has a non productive syntactic structure only single particular lexemes can collocate in an idiomatic construction. Substituting other words from the same generic lexical relation set will destroy the idiomatic meaning of the expression

Eg: *Drive someone crazy*

➤ It is anomalous syntactic. It has unusual grammatical structure

Ex: *by and by*

Semantically, idioms have two layers of meaning. To decipher an idiom, you must recognize and understand the meaning of both layers :

- ✓ Literal meaning: the initial, basic meaning of the idioms, based on the words used and what they mean in a literal sense.
- ✓ Idiomatic meaning: the underlying message, lesson or device offered by the idiom; the meaning of the overall expression, in a broader sense.

Ex: *put the cart before the horse*

Literal meaning: At first glance, this idiom might not even register as anything out of the ordinary. Yet, the advice given actually make little sense – horses should be placed before carts, not the other way around. The idiom suggests the reverse of how things should be.

Idiomatic meaning: reverse the natural order of things. Try something new. Be innovative.

3. Types of idioms

In daily life, we use idioms frequently in communication, in literature, and so on but we cannot classify kinds of idioms. There are many opinions about types of idioms, according to *Tim_Nicolas* at *Essex_University (Idioms:*

structural and psychological perspectives;1995;237-238), there are some kinds of idioms which are classified based on structure of sentence:

➤ **Verb + bare singular noun phrase**

Ex: *carry weight*

➤ **Verb + non definite plural noun phrase**

Ex: *speak volumes*

➤ **Verb + a + noun**

Ex: *come a cropper*

➤ **Verb +the +noun**

Ex: *bite the dust*

➤ **Verb + one's (own)+ noun**

Ex: *change one's tune*

➤ **Verb + noun phrase +noun**

Ex: *pull somebody's leg*

➤ **Support-type verb + non definite noun phrase**

Ex: *make a splash*

4. Idioms versus compounds

Compound word (or just “compound” for short) is therefore a word that consists of at least two root morphemes. It is clear that the components of a compound may be either simple or derived words or even other compound words.

E.g: *grapefruit juice* *schoolteacher*
 sister-in-law *lady-killer*

Compounds are sequences of two or more words arranged in a grammatical construction and acting as a unit in a sentence.

An idiom is (usually) a type of compound that has a meaning that may not relate to the meanings of its individual words. It is a figure of speech.

Compound words have many kinds, but classification according to the meaning, compounds have two types:

➤ **Non- idiomatic compounds** (motivated): the meaning of the whole word is easily deduced from the meanings of the components.

Ex: *Goal- keeper*

Love story

➤ **Idiomatic compounds** (non- motivated): the meaning of the whole word is not the total, sum of meanings of the components.

Ex: *Lip- service*

Blackleg

Some idiomatic usages are compounds and some compounds that are not idioms convey idiomatic meaning also. That is all idiomatic usages are not compounds, but some compounds are idioms. The compounds with an idiomatic sense are also used to convey the undertone or sarcastic sense. This type of compounds is commonly used in newspapers to sarcastically criticize the government and the political leaders.

The structural analysis of all the idiomatic compounds shows the following grammatical combinations while forming idiomatic expression.

5. Idioms versus proverbs

Although idioms and proverbs are used very much in life but there are many differences and similarities which we can distinct them.

Proverbs are brief memorable saying that offer ethical direction in specific situation from generation and generation, they are a feature of almost all cultures, historically as well as today. Proverbs are tailor- made for primary oral culture where, with no system in scrimption, what cannot be remembered is lost, but even in contemporary literacy cultures, new sayings continue to be coined; therefore so much so that sometimes, their specific meaning is no longer relevant .For instance, the proverb “*penny wise, pound foolish*” is a holdover from when America was British colony and use the pound as currency.

Proverbs are passed down through time with little change in form, they are often used metaphorically and it is understanding their metaphorical nature what we can unravel their meaning while “*a stitch in time saves nine*”, “*do not count your chickens before they have hatched*” are common proverbs, few of as stitch clothes, count the chicken.

Proverbs often make use of grammatical and theoretical devices that help to make them memorable including alliteration, rhyme, parallel structure repetition of key words or phrases and strong imagery.

There are some distinctions between idioms and proverbs:

- ❖ Firstly, proverbs are full statements with their correct grammar but idioms are not

For example: *True love never grows old* **versus** *kick the habit*

- ❖ Secondly, unlike idiom, the meaning of proverbs can be deduced from the meaning of constituents.

Ex: *The belly is not filled with fair word* **versus** *Skin and bones*

According to Pham Van Binh (1999:12) :

Proverbs are section of folklore, that is, they are a “*complete words of literature*”. Therefore, proverbs have all fundamental functions of literature such as the apprehension aesthetic, education and so on. On the contrary, idioms are only section of language and idioms alone cannot express an idea completely, so it equals to words only. Hence, they do not have function as proverb do and are often used to replace words so that expression effects of the sentient can be strengthened.

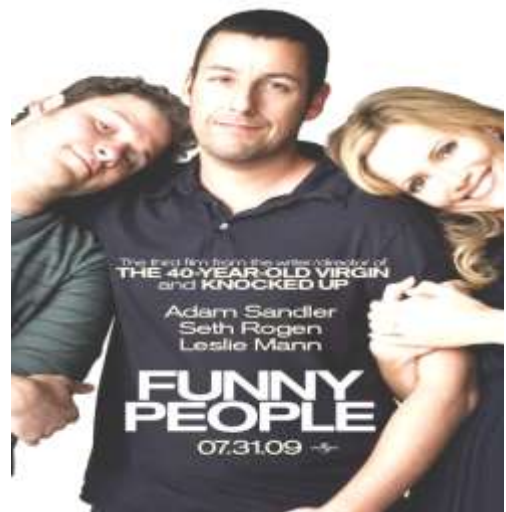
Idioms and proverbs are considered as special units of each language. They honestly and exactly reflect history experiences, spiritual valuable, religious option. They make people’s languages more beautiful and lifelike in literature as well as communication.

CHAPTER 2: ENGLISH IDIOMS RELATING TO PEOPLE

DESCRIPTION

I. English idioms relating to people description

In literature as well as communication in daily life, idioms are one of the most popular parts of each language. Thanks to idioms, languages become more beautiful and have good effects in conversations. In all types of idioms, idioms relating to people description are frequently used in daily life. We use them to tell, assess, judge or criticize people through their appearance and characters in different contexts. With people's appearance, the author has a special attention to idioms related to parts of body's people because of its variety in English. Each part of body, there are many idioms describing them and they are often used in living language. In this research, the author wants to give some idioms relating to people description. They are interesting idioms which the author collected and analyzed to find out their popularity and effectiveness when using them in literature and daily communication. They are only compounds, phrases or words but they make your conversations or works better much more. Partners in your conversations or people read your works will be satisfied that they had when they talk to you or read your works. The following idioms which are typical idioms expressing people description consist of people's appearance, people's moods and attitudes and people's characters idioms I collected and studied.



1. English idioms describing people's appearance

Never underestimate the importance of appearance in society. It is a fact that people judge you by your appearance. The better you are dressed, the more respect you get from others.

The fact is that it is human nature to be leery of someone who is dressed in weird, dirty or shabby clothes. It suggests a lack of intelligence and lazy neediness..

Appearance of people is very important in modern life because sometimes someone will assess you through your appearance.

In English idioms dictionary, there are many idioms describing appearance of people. We use parts of the body and appearance of people to describe people in different situations and contexts to have a good effect in communication. Due to time allowance and limited knowledge, the author cannot cover all idioms relating to appearance's people. This study only focus on some idioms which the author collected.

1.1. In bad shape

A person who is *in bad shape* is in poor physical condition. He or she is often lazy in doing exercises daily or they have no activities in a long time. Especially is a patient. So, they are unfit or unhealthy. Our health are "everything", whether you are a toddler, a child, a teenage or an adult, a good health enable you to perform the daily functions of life.

Eg:

After two weeks in hospital, she is in bad shape because she drinks many medicines.

(www.idiomsite.com)

People who have just recovered after treating in hospital are often very weak and in a poor condition physical because of a lot of causes : lacking of contacting with outside environment; they cannot eat much; they must use a lot of medicines and treatment methods and so on. Woman in this example

was in hospital two weeks, this is a long time and when going out hospital, she *is in bad shape*.

Good health also help us enable to enjoy life. The best way to have a good health, we should have a suitable diet and often do exercise daily to have an abundant physical condition. If you are not, you will be *in bad shape*.

1.2. Hale and hearty

Someone, especially an old person, who is *hale and hearty* is in excellent health. Health is very important, you are what you eat, what you eat affects your health, when you do not watch your diet, your health faces problems. Having an excellent health is not easy for people and this is extremely difficult for old people. But, nowadays there are many old persons who have *hale or hearty* health, means that they have an excellent healthy condition. Maybe they have a diet and take part in exercise training clubs. Besides, some people say that we should have only a few lifestyle choices as large an impact on your health as physical activities. People who are physically active for about 7 hours a week have a 40 percent, healthier, lower risk of dying early than those who are active for less than 30 minutes a week.

Ex:

"My grandmother is still hale and hearty at the age of ninety".

(www.learn-english-today.com)

The idiom *hale and hearty* is often used to describe old people who have a good health and alive, especially old people. The woman in example is at the age of ninety but she still has a good condition of health. With that condition, this woman can implement a lot of things because she is a *hale and hearty* person.

1.3. Bag of bones

Someone is *a bag of bones* means that they are extremely thin, very underweight, they are a skinny, malnourished person. Bag is a container of flexible material, such as paper, plastic, or leather, that is used for carrying or storing items. This idiom uses image "*bag contains a lot of bones*" to say

about tin people. There are only bones and without flesh in their body. People who has a bag of bones body, they are often very weak. They are thin because they are lazy in doing exercise and eating, another reason is their body cannot absorb all foods they ate in daily meals.



Eg: *"When he came home from the war he was a bag of bones."*

(www.learn-english-today.com)

War is a contest between nations or states, carried on by force, whether for defense, for revenging insults and redressing wrongs, for the extension of commerce, for the acquisition of territory, for obtaining and establishing the superiority and dominion of one over the other, or for any other purpose; armed conflict of sovereign powers; declared and open hostilities. This is a difficult time, especially, they have difficulties in foods and drinks. The man in the above example who take in war are often very thin and have a malnutrition diet. Consequently, when they come to their home after a long war time, they are only *a bag of bones*.

1.4. Like chalk and cheese

The idiom expresses two persons or two things that might possibly be confused but which are in fact very different, have nothing in common, superficially alike, are totally different in their qualities. In a family, each member has a different personality, maybe they resemble their mother or father or even they are completely different from each other. The idiom “*like chalk and cheese*” has the same meaning with the idioms “*An apple and an orange*”. A comparison of *apples and oranges* occurs when two items or groups of items are compared that cannot be validly compared.

The idiom comparing *apples and oranges*, refers to the apparent differences between items which are popularly thought to be incomparable or incommensurable, such as apples and oranges. The idiom may also be used to indicate that a false analogy has been made between two items, such as where an *apple* is faulted for not being a good *orange*.

Eg: *Jane and her sister like chalk and cheese in studying*

(www.usingenglish.com)

In studying, Jane and her little sister have a clearly difference. Her sister is always a superior person in her class, people admire her very much. On the other hand, Jane is very lazy in doing her homework, she have never take mark B at school. So, people in Jane’s family are usually said that “*two girl like chalk and cheese*”

Chalk and cheese are two items which have an opposite meaning. This idiom uses two opposite image to say about differences between two objects or two people. By the sixteenth century, this phrase had become a fixed expression. The equivalent of “*as different as night and day*” in America. This is sometimes shortened to “*chalk and cheese*”.

1.5. Dressed to kill

When someone, especially a woman, is *dressed to kill*, they are wearing very fashionable or glamorous clothes intended to attract attention. Fashion has always been about looking toward nature for inspiration but has a long history of not being good to nature. In past years, ostriches were killed mercilessly

for plumes, whales hunted to near extinction to produce such products as whalebone corsets, and leopards were routinely killed to create coats, hats, and all manner of true "animal print". Their passion on fashion is never burnt down.

Eg: "*She arrived at the reception dressed to kill*".

(www.learn-english-today.com)

Today, women in modern life are very interested in shopping and fashion. This is an effective way to relax and refresh yourself because they appear after public more frequently than they used. So, they are often *dressed to kill* to have good result in communication and their work.

1.6. Look a sight

If a person *looks a sight*, their appearance is awful, unsuitable or very untidy. They are untidy because they are so poor that they cannot buy new clothes, or maybe they do not know how to improve their appearance, even they have no time to pay attention to their appearance. This can make them not to be attractive to other people. On the other hand, they only receive a bad sight when they appear after crowds.

Eg: "*She looks a sight in that dress!*"

(www.learn-english-today.com)

The girl in the above example is very untidy and unclean-lambled in her costume and her style. This makes other people are too surprised to utter that "*she looks a sight in her dress*".

1.7. As fresh as a daisy

On contrary to the idiom "*look at sight*", "*as fresh as a daisy*" expresses about someone who is lively and attractive, in a clean and fresh way, people who always know to improve their appearance by fashionable and smart clothes, fresh style and smiling. They are a clean-lambled person and attractive their partners. This idiom is used to describing women. "*Daisy*" is a kind of flower which symbolizes for innocence and purity.



Eg:

"I met Molly the other day. She looked as fresh as a daisy!"

(www.learn-english-today.com)

When Molly looks *as fresh as a daisy*, she is more lively and different than she was. People surrounding her will see that she is much more good-looking, she makes her people surrounding pay attention to her because of her style and appearance.

2. English idioms describing people's moods

Moods of people are often expressed in their face. In English language, there are the *moods* that people feel such as: exhausted, confused, ecstatic, guilty, suspicious, angry, hysterical, nervous.... In regular, physical activities can help keep your thinking, learning, and judgment skills sharp as you age. It can also reduce your risk of depression and may help you sleep better, have a better physical strength. Sometimes, moods of people reflect characters of people.

2.1. Face like thunder

If someone has "*a face like thunder*", they look clearly very angry or upset about something, the face when someone is angry, their face are often red and

awesome. This idiom uses image “*thunder*” to describe the face of people when they are extremely angry. *Thunder* is the sound made by lightning, depending on the nature of the lightning and distance of the listener, thunder can range from a sharp, loud crack to a long, low rumble. When seeing the thunder, people often fear and think about horrible things. *Thunder* is compared with people’s face when they are angry, upset or worry about something.

Eg: “*When my dad is really angry, he has a face like thunder! And we often avoid him at that time*”.

(www.learn-english-today.com)

When you see someone’s face like thunder, I think that you should have a distance with them to avoid a bad consequence.

2.2. Tongue-tied

If you are “*tongue-tied*”, you have difficulties in expressing yourself because you are nervous or embarrassed. This idiom are often used for people who have an interview for their jobs or maybe they will take part in exams or competitions. At that time, they often stand and keep still in a long time, they usually feel that their tongue are tied and they cannot talk or do something else, they are unable to express yourself clearly and fluently; feel tongue-tied with embarrassment. They have those feelings because of many reasons, due to big pressure of competitions, because there are many people who is more excellent and superior than them, or even by their bad health make them not confident and lead to they are *tongue-tied*.

Eg: “*At the start of the interview, I was completely tongue-tied. But a little by little I relaxed*”

(www.learn-english-today.com)



Candidates or competitors are often very nervous and upset when facing with interviews or competitions. In interviews, they often cannot answer questions of interviewers. To overcome this feeling, they need a short of time to relax and keep calm. When they cannot say, they are *tongue-tied*, this can make them unsuccessful.

2.3. Face like a wet weekend

If someone has a *face like a wet weekend*, they are wearing a sad expression and look miserable, If someone has a "*face like a wet weekend*", it means you are very sad and you show on your face clearly, like your weekend was ruined and you cannot do what you were planning to do.

Eg 1:

We wait all week to stop working and have a weekend of freedom but then it rains and everyone is sad!

(www.italki.com)

Eg 2: "*What's wrong with Peter? He's got a face like a wet weekend.*"

(www.learn-english-today.com)

In *example 1*, we spent much time to plan and prepare for a trip after a long working process. Yet at last, we might lay off our travelling due to the

weather do not support us, it was rainy. All members in our group were very unhappy and had *a face like a wet weekend*.

In *the second example*, Peter is very sad, his face has no a bit happiness. Of course, he has a problem because he is a humorous person, he often laughs all day. However, today is unusual, he has *a face like a wet weekend* in company, my director considered that he has some difficulties in his family.

2.4. Old head on young shoulders

This expression is used to refer to a child or young person who thinks and expresses themselves like an older more-experienced person, the. In fact, there are many children who have thoughts and attitudes of adults. They often say their thoughts when they meet suitable situations and that make your parents surprised and admire them. Some parents think that those children are very intelligent because they pay attention to their parents, surrounding people and ape them. In contrast, some people considered that it is not always good for “*old head on young shoulders*” kids. Their parents often tend steal their children's childhood by forcing those kids to study very hard.



Eg:

"When she heard Emily warning her little brother to stay out of trouble, her mum thought : "That's an old head on young shoulders".

(www.learn-english-today.com)

Emily is only a child but she is always has thought of an adult, she often worries about her little brother. Her mum is surprise at her behavior and says that she is *an old head on young shoulders* child.

A child only should have a childish thought because "*children like buds on the stem*". Children should learn from adults good things to grow normally and wholly.

2.5. Doubting Thomas

A *doubting Thomas* is a person who will not believe something without proof, or without seeing it for themselves. They are one who is habitually doubtful, chronic skeptic . Saint Thomas, apostle, who doubted Jesus Christ's resurrection and this idiom borrows his image to describe people who are not easy to believe somebody without proof. They only believes what they see themselves, not what they are told.

Eg: *Her husband is a doubting Thomas, he rarely believes her because she is very beautiful.*

(www.usingenglish.com)

A beautiful woman is always attractive other people. Consequently, husbands of beautiful women often worry about their wife. They suspect whatever their wife say and do, they only trust their wife when they witness by their own eyes. So, they are considered that like a *doubting Thomas*.

2.6. Tongue-in-Cheek

Tongue-in-cheek is an idiom used to refer to humor in which a statement, or an entire fictional work, is not meant to be taken seriously, but its sarcasm is subtle, ironic, slyly humorous; not meant to be taken seriously. People who have a tongue in cheek, they are a humorous person and consider that all things are very simple, If something is tongue in cheek, it isn't serious or

meant to be taken seriously. This idiom clearly alludes to the facial expression created by putting one's tongue in one's cheek. This induces a wink (*go on - try it*), which has long been an indication that what is being said is to be taken with a pinch of salt. It may have been used to suppress laughter. In fact “Tongue in cheek” is the antithesis of the later phrase – “with a straight face”.

Eg:

Anna: Why were you teasing Sonia about her new hair? She really took offense at what you said.

Mary : I did not mean to offend her. I was simply making a *tongue-in-cheek* remark when I said that it was too elaborate for a girl of her young, tender age.

Anna : Well, she thought you were serious. She had no idea that you were just saying that as a joke.

Mary : I am really sorry. I suppose I owe her an apology.

(www.englishdaily626.com)

Anna is a humorous girl, she thinks what she says to her friend is not important, only a joke. However, she is wrong because in life there are a lot of people who do not joke and her friend is typical example. With only a joke saying, Anna make her friend offended. In this situation, the best way is Anna should go to meet her friend to say an apology and have an experience for next times : only joke somebody who are humorous like herself because of *tongue in cheek* is not suitable in any contexts.

2.7. All ears

When you present an issue after crowds, the most important thing is you must attract those crowds in your presentation. In the end of presentation, you often see popular block of word: “*Thank you for your attention !*”.

Eg: "*Of course I want to know – I am all ears!*"

(www.learn-english-today.com)

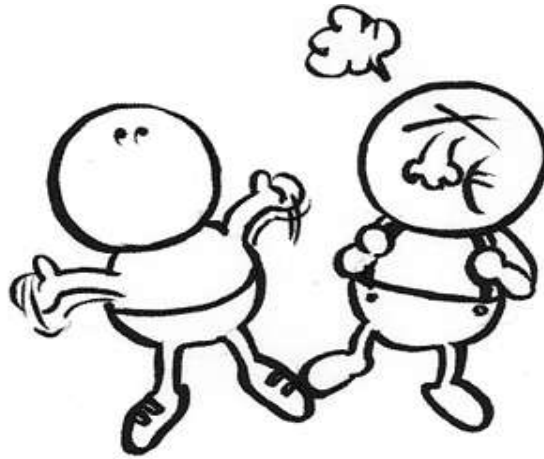


If you are *all ears* means that you are listening very attentively all things other people are saying, you are very interested in hearing about something. This is a way which respects other people when they have a presentation or speech standing before you.

The *ear* is the organ by which a person hears. So, if we figuratively say that "*you are all ears*" it means that at that moment you are keenly listening to whatever is being said. It is as if no other part of your body mattered except your ears.

2.8. Nose out of joint

If a person's nose is *out of joint*, they have been upset, embarrassed or offended by somebody or something. This idiom describes the mood of people when they meet a strange people or a problem which they cannot solve it and they become angry. In originally, this phrase is quite old and was used a long time ago.



Your *nose is out of joint* when the look on your face and the way you act shows other people that you are upset, especially when you are forgotten by someone.

Eg: *"What's wrong with him?"*

"His nose is out of joint because we forgot to invite him to the party."

The man in example is very upset and may have a strange expression on his face and this makes other people realize that he is extremely embarrassed because he was forgotten by his friends for coming a party.

In life, we often encounter many impossible and awkward situations. At that time, we should not be upset or offended, let us smile and consider that it is a small thing because all things have solutions.

3. English idioms describing people's characters

Most people are concerned about characters of other people. You want to know what type of person and individual is before getting into a relationship with that person. If you were going to become involved in a business exchange, you would want to know the character or the other person or company. The same is true for electing government officials.

Before you deal or interact with another person, you would like to know what type of person he or she is, especially before getting more involved. This is especially of concern in romantic relationships.

The first area usually concerns social character issues. You want to know if the other person is honest and reliable. You probably do not like someone who is sarcastic and rude. You like someone who is sharing and hospitable.

Another area of concern are the values and rules the person follows. Some people prefer to deal with those who are of the same religion or political persuasion as they are.

Personal character traits are most important if the relationship is to become close, like in a romantic sense. A woman may think twice about getting involved with a man who was lazy and did not want to get a job.

In any personal relationship or interaction, people tend to gravitate toward others who have a similar character. Also, some positive traits may overshadow various negative traits in a person.

3.1. Positive characters

There are many positive character traits. The ones we show here are ones that, in our opinion, demonstrates those of a person with a positive disposition. A person's character is defined by the way the person thinks, how they feel, and how they act not only during the good times but during challenging times. In my study about English idioms relating to people description consist of idioms expressing positive characters of people which make me interested in such as:

3.1.1. “As cool as cucumber”

If someone is as cool as a cucumber, they do not get worried by anything, they are always optimistic and see their life with pink, they are always calm and unruffled after all situations.

Eg:

Ray was as cool as a cucumber about his exam because he studied all week for it.

(www.learn-english-today.com)

After exams, we are really often upset, worried about them because we are afraid of difficulties. In contrast, Ray was calm and self-confident due to he was hard-working for studying all week.



Cool here means imperturbable rather than having a low temperature. *Cucumbers* are cool to the touch, relatively cold, or, served cold, usually. When we meet a problem, we often think a lot and feel worried and tired. So we should learn to be “*as cool as cucumber*” because of being cool at all time is a very important trait. Being able to appear under control at all times is a characteristic that will draw others to you. Tightly wound or stressed out people who are always on the verge of a breakdown or flip out whenever the slightest thing goes wrong are no fun to be around.

3.1.2. Grin and bear it

Grin and bear it is a good character of people, especially in women. If you are *grin and bear it*, you have to accept something that you do not like. In daily life, sometimes we must do something which we do not want or even dislike to do. Maybe because we are forced by someone, if we object to them,

we will face many problems. The best way in these situation is “*grin and bear it*”.



In the old society, women always suffered much misery. They have no voice of their own in their family and society, they often are beaten ruthlessly by their husband or even by their parents. Women often *grin and bear it* to keep atmosphere of family. In contrast, in modern life, women and men are equal, they have the same role in their family and society. Hence, women in modern life do not *grin and bear it* any more.

Eg:

A: What about if you have done something wrong? Does he pretend not to know?

B: In most cases, he would just *grin and bear it*. He is a broadminded person.

A: That is a hard thing to do. I cannot put up with that.

B: People are different. One man’s meat is another man’s poison, you know?

(*Đinh Kim Quốc Bảo:2001: 44*)

In this example, the man only *grin and bear it* because of his impossible situation, he have no other choice although unrelated persons have solutions.

3.1.3. Spick and span

If someone is a *spick and span* people, they are very clean and tidy. The idiom “*as neat as a new pin*” has the same meaning. The alliteration in this idiom suggests the possibility that that one of the two words alluded to

cleanliness and freshness and that the other just followed along. Other meaning of this idiom is a new brand. The spelling *spic-and-span* is generally accepted as a legitimate alternative to the original *spick-and-span*.

Eg:

"When I get home from work today, I find Mai's room *spick-and-span*!"

(www.alphadictionary.com)

Mai is a lazy girl, she never puts in order her room and all her house. Her mother often must do all housework or even Mai do not arrange her own room carefully. However, today when her mother comes to home, she are extremely surprised at her daughter because Mai's room is very clean and tidy.

This is a good character of people, we should learn and always keep our room and house *spick and span*.



3.1.4. Nice as pie

If a person is *nice as pie*, they are surprisingly very kind and friendly. How to know a people is kind or not, we must base on many factors. Firstly, we can see in the way they behave with us. A kind and friendly person is often a man which is willing to help everybody without individual goals and he is the one that can make anyone happy just by smiling at them. People like that can make a big impact on people's lives. In addition, to know a kind and friendly person, we can observe the way they behave toward his related person.



Eg: *"After our argument, she was nice as pie!"*

(www.learn-english-today.com)

At the first time, we cannot assess a person, we need to have a long process to search and understand her or him. In the above example, after an argument, you can know about her character.

3.1.5. Bury the hatchet

The expression *"bury the hatchet"* is used when people who have had a disagreement decide to forget their quarrel and become friends again, somebody make peace with other ones and stop arguing or fighting to them in order to keep a good relationship in life. The idiom *"bury the hatchet"* refers to a Native American- origin of this idiom, practice of literally burying a tomahawk rocket, or hatchet, in the ground as a symbol of a peace agreement between tribes, it signifies that peace has been established between two people or groups of people, frequently after a long running dispute.



Eg:

"I did not agree with my colleague's decision, but for the sake of peace, I decided to bury the hatchet."

(www.learn-english-today.com)

His colleague give a decision in business. Even though he disagrees with his friend's opinions , he do not object because he wants to bury the hatchet keeping peace between him and his colleagues.

3.2. Negative characters

People are not always perfect and wonderful. People's characters are grown up when they were born and their growing up day by day. Characters of people can be affected by many things, such as by their parents, their surrounding people and environment. People's characters can be good or bad, positive or negative depending on their own. In this study, I only focus on English idioms relating to people description, especially is people's characters. Some following idioms describe negative characters of people:

3.2.1. A fair-weather friend

This expression talks about a friend who is only a friend when circumstances are pleasant or profitable. At the first sign of trouble, these capricious, disloyal friends will drop their relationship with you.

A fair weather friend is a friend who does not help in times of difficulty. Likely nautical in nature, referring to the fact that when weather is good

nearly anyone can help on a ship. They are the type of people who are always there when times are good but forgets about you when things get difficult or problems crop up.

Eg:

“Lisa thinks that her friend, Tom, is a fair weather friend because she only seems to call when things are going well. The minute a problem arises for Lisa, Tom does not answer her calls and avoids her at all costs”.

(<http://www.english-test.net/forum/ftopic41451.html>)

Tom is not a good friend, is a *fair weather friend*, Lisa thinks that. he only calls to her when things are going well. However, when Lisa has a problem, he often disappears and leaves Lisa alone.

In life, there are many kinds of person. We can distinguish who is good, who is bad and we must be careful in selecting our friends to avoid faults.

3.2.2. “A fly in ointment”

Meaning of this idiom is a small but irritating flaw that spoils the whole thing, something or someone that spoils or prevents complete enjoyment of other things which could have been successful or pleasant.

Originally, these days ointments are chiefly for medicinal use - just the thing for rubbing on that nasty rash. In earlier times though ointments were more likely to be creams or oils with a cosmetic or ceremonial use. Literally, ointment was the substance one was anointed with.

Eg:

A: That is indeed *a fly in the ointment* for them. But not everyone is the same.

B: I know. But I subconsciously have a dislike of these people.

A: I understand that. But you may try your luck and not let anything slip through your fingers

B: Alright. I will be expecting another chances.

(Đinh Kim Quốc Bảo :2001:32)

A fly in ointment is an old idiom still in use today. The idea behind this idiom is that ointment is something good - you use it to soothe painful skin or

improve your appearance, so basically a smooth, peaceful situation can be compared to ointment. On the other hand, flies are associated with dirt, disease and general unpleasantness. If you have a fly in your jar of ointment, the jar is contaminated and you will not want to use it again, or at least until you have got rid of the fly. So it really is quite a logical idiom.

3.2.3. “Loose cannon”

Someone who is referred to as a *loose cannon* is a member of a group who cannot be completely trusted because of unpredictable and irresponsible behavior which can cause trouble or danger. They are often have tends to do strange things and this make other people dissatisfied or angry. Maybe they cannot control themselves, they usually have an independent thought in all activities. When they have those behaviors, it is time they are as *loose cannon*.

Eg:

"Keep an eye on Jamie. He tends to turn into a loose cannon when he has a few drinks."

(www.learn-english-today.com/idioms/idioms_proverbs.html)

The man in the above example has no belief in somebody in originally. Hence, people surrounding him and his friends are often watchful and cautious with him. Especially, when people have a few drinks, all their actions are criticized and reviewed. When drinking, people often lose their head and lead to something wrong in their actions.

3.2.4. “As sly as a fox”

Someone who is *as sly as a fox* is cunning and experienced and can get what they want, often in an underhand way, that you are sneaky. *Foxes* are *sly* to escape enemies. They will lead them across roads, floating logs, and in general, obstacles. If you are *as sly as a fox*, you are extremely clever and cunning.

Ex: *"You should be watchful with him, he is as sly as fox".*

(www.learn-english-today.com)

Although he is a kind man but sometimes he has artful actions and thoughts which make other people need to be watchful and frighten. Hence, people say that he is *as sly as fox*.



In China, fox animal symbolism revolved around the afterlife. Lore has it that a fox sighting was thought to be a signal from the spirits of the deceased.

The Celts understood the fox knows the woods intimately, and they would rely upon the fox as their guide in the spirit world.

In Japan, the fox was considered one of the rain spirits, and a messenger of Inari the rice god. Here the fox also symbolizes longevity and protection from evil.

In Native American lore, fox animal symbolism deals with two interpretations.

In this expression, when we say about someone who is *as sly as fox*, they are people who always think a lot of ways to overcome difficulties and problems and they do not care their actions are good or bad. Sometimes, they will not be successful and not to be respected by other people

.

3.2.5. Holier-than-thou

This expression is used to describe the attitude of people who consider themselves to be more virtuous or morally superior to others, exhibiting an attitude of superior virtue; offensively self-righteously pious. Meaning of this idiom like meaning of word “*over-confident*”. People who is holier-than-thou is a person always consider that they are always right in whatever they do and wherever they are.

Eg:

"I can't stand the holier-than-thou attitude of some candidates."

(www.learn-english-today.com)

In competitions and interviews, there are many people who have *holier-than-thou* attitude because of their talent, they exhibit an attitude of superior virtue; self-righteously pious toward other people.

In particular, *holier-than-thou* leads to a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and subsequent performance.

In fact, idioms help learners see the interest, the beauty as well as the cultural color of languages which help us use and understand correctly and clearly. I hope that learners will understand about idioms in English specially idioms relating to people description throughout this study.

CHAPTER 3:
SOME DIFFICULTIES FACED BY VIETNAMESE
LEARNERS OF ENGLISH IN STUDYING IDIOMS
RELATING TO PEOPLE DESCRIPTION

1. Some difficulties in studying idioms relating to people description.

In fact, many people want to learn English idioms but they have a lot of difficulties. The following are some difficulties the author have had in the process of researching this graduation paper:

Firstly, most of idioms are difficult to guess the meaning correctly because they have an association with the ordinary meaning of the individual words or phrases. They can be guessed if they were heard in the context that is, when we know they are used in a particular situation.

Secondly, the main difficulty is that learners do not know the level of style; that is, whether an idiom can be used in a formal or an informal situation. In the formal situation, when we do not know person very well we are talking to or the occasion is public, we choose word much more carefully. It would be wrong to choose a slang expression. This means that we can express that same information or idea in more than one way using different level of style.

Thirdly, when translating English idioms, it is not easy for Vietnamese suitable equivalence to the nuance of meaning of English idioms. An idiom may be used in the text in both the literal and idiomatic senses at the same time. Hence, if an idiom in the target language does not correspond to the source language of idiom in form and meaning the role of idiom cannot be successfully translated.

2. Suggested solutions

As far as I have experienced, the best way to study idioms is learning by heart and applying them in the suitable context. Besides, we can find an interesting way to learn them through reading books, newspapers and magazines in order to understand more about English culture, people and society.

And with above difficulties, how to overcome them is still a great question. The following suggestions are mentioned to help Vietnamese learners in their English studying:

Firstly, the learners can analyze the meaning of all components or study the meaning in the context or ask the native speakers.

Secondly, it is advisable not to make frequent use of slang expressions because it is easy to sound strange. And using idioms with neutral style is a good idea. Besides, knowing an idiom is neutral or appreciate in a certain situation is also difficulty. This can only be learnt by careful reading of English books which contain idioms. The learners should take careful note of examples of usage in typical situation.

Lastly, some English idioms have more than one Vietnamese equivalent so the learners should be careful when choosing them because if they choose the idioms which reflect the specialties of Vietnamese nature and society too much, the unity of English style will be lost, some English idioms have no Vietnamese equivalent, we can translate them into our language but we must keep the suitable nuance of meaning.

3. EXERCISES FOR PRACTICE

Exercise 1: Choose the best answer to fill the blank:

1. It was such a sad movie that I...

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| A. faced the music | C. got cold feet |
| B. cried on my heart out | D. was in over my head. |

2. I cut my own hair because the hairdresser costs...

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| A. pull one's leg | C. an arm and a leg |
|-------------------|---------------------|

B. break a leg

D. an old hand

3. ...I'm sure someone will find your kitten.

A. My lips are sealed

C. Stick your neck out

B. See eye to eye

D. Keep your chin up

4. I love cotton candy. I have a sweet...

A. taste

C. tongue

B. mouth

D. tooth

5. I am just...your legs. I didn't really dye my hair blue.

A. eating

C. pulling

B. catching

D. cutting

6. On the weekends I like to drink wine and...

A. get a head start

C. let my hair down

B. get off my chest

D. keep an eye on

7. Let's get together in my...of the woods for once.

A. head

C. hand

B. neck

D. foot

8. We're going away for the week. Can you keep...on our house?

A. your chin

C. a hair

B. an eye

D. a foot

9. It makes my...when people don't clear their snowy sidewalks.

A. hair grow

C. mouth drop

B. teeth ache

D. blood boil

10. I wish I knew his phone number by...

A. mind

C. nose

B. heart

D. eyes

Exercise 2: Matching idioms in column A with suitable meanings in column B:

A Idioms	B Meaning
1. Old head on young shoulders	a. Mentioning people who is very clean-lambded and well- ordered.
2. Down in the mouth	b. The idiom describe someone who look unhappy, discouraged or depressed.
3. Neck and neck	c. Means that you are listening very attentively.
4. A fresh pair of eyes	d. This expression is used to refer to a child or young person who thinks and expresses themselves like an older more-experienced person.
5. Spick and span	e. This idioms says that so it is impossible to say who will win in a competition.
6. All ears	f. A small thing but irritating flaw that spoils the whole thing.
7. A fly in ointment	g. This expression a person who is brought in to examine something carefully.

PART 3: CONCLUSION

As you know, it is clear that idioms play an important part not only in the literature such as those poems in poems, stories, novels, newspapers but also in the daily communication

Thanks to idioms, people can express their thought, feeling flexibly exactly and vividly. It is necessary to understand them well to guess their meanings and get information correctly. However, due to my limitation of time as well as my knowledge, the author have just mentioned some certain aspects of theory of idioms presented in the background part (chapter I) with the hope that readers can have basic knowledge of them and identify them better. There are many sources of idioms in this paper, this study only focus on some those about culinary theme mentioned in the chapter II. The author find this topic is very interesting and we not only know more idioms from its usages, culture and life in each. Some English idioms relating to people description to find the similarities and difficulties in the way of the using metaphor but each of them express one meaning, sometimes two idioms have the same meaning and this brings learners interesting things.

Learning idioms is not an easy task, so students often get confusing in defining memorizing and using them. To overcome, some solutions are introduced in chapter III such as learning by heart, reading books, magazines, stories, pictures and studying culture of each country.

All what has been referred to in this paper come from the limited understanding and ability. It is, however, hope that this study will be a small contribution to figure out the interesting significance of the idioms of the international language and a reference to those who are interested in English as well as English culture can open other topic for further study.

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APPENDICES

I. Appendic 1: English idions relating to people description

Idioms	Meanings and examples
In over your head	If you are in over your head , you are involved in something that is too difficult for you to handle. Ex: "I accepted to organize the festival, but I quickly realized that I was in over my head."
All ears	To say that you are all ears means that you are listening very attentively. Ex: "Of course I want to know - I'm all ears!"
Eagle eyes	Someone who has eagle eyes sees or notices things more easily than others. Ex: "Tony will help us find it - he's got eagle eyes!"
Over my dead body	This expression is used when you absolutely refuse to allow someone to do something. Ex: "Mum, can I get my nose pierced?" " Over my dead body! "
Up in arms	If you are up in arms about something, you are very angry. Ex: "The population was up in arms over the demolition of the old theatre."
Bag of bones	To say that someone is a bag of bones means that they are extremely thin. Ex: "When he came home from the war he was a bag of bones."
Change of heart	If someone has a change of heart , they change their attitude or feelings, especially towards greater friendliness or cooperation. Ex: "He was against charity, but he had a change of heart when he saw the plight of the homeless."
Heart of stone	Someone who has a heart of stone is a cold person who shows others no understanding, sympathy or pity.

	Ex: "She's not the person to go to if you've got problems - she's got a heart of stone!"
From hand to mouth	If you live from hand to mouth , you don't have enough money to save. Whatever you earn is spent on food and other essentials. Ex: "Most families in that poor area live from hand to mouth."
The bee's knees	If you say that someone or something is the bee's knees , you think they are exceptionally good. Ex: "Julie thinks she's the bee's knees" means that Julie has a high opinion of herself!
Sea legs	A person who has sea legs is used to walking on a moving ship, or has the ability to adjust to a new situation. Ex: "It takes a while in a new job to find your sea legs."
A bad egg	To refer to someone as a bad egg means that they cannot be trusted. Ex: "I don't want my son to be friends with Bobby Smith. Bobby's a bad egg."
Big cheese	This expression refers to a person who has a lot of power and influence in an organization. Ex: "Tom's father is a big cheese in the oil industry."
As cool as a cucumber	If someone is as cool as a cucumber, they don't get worried by anything, they are always optimistic and see their life with pink, they are calm and unruffled.
Eager beaver	The term eager beaver refers to a person who is hardworking and enthusiastic, sometimes considered overzealous.
As fresh as a daisy	Someone who is as fresh as a daisy is lively and attractive, in a clean and fresh way. Ex: "I met Molly the other day. She looked as fresh as a daisy!"
Sour grapes	To say that someone's attitude is " sour grapes " means that they are making complaints or accusations because they are jealous
High and mighty	Someone who is high and mighty behaves in a haughty

	<p>manner, as if they were superior to others.</p> <p>Ex: "Don't you get all high and mighty!" said my grandmother to my cousin.</p> <p>"Everyone helps with the housework in this house."</p>
Holier-than-thou	<p>This expression is used to describe the attitude of people who consider themselves to be more virtuous or morally superior to others.</p> <p>Ex: "I can't stand the holier-than-thou attitude of some candidates."</p>
A dark horse	<p>If you refer to a person as a "dark horse", you mean that they are secretive, or that little is known about them.</p>
Mouse potato	<p>This term refers to a person who spends a lot of time in front of the computer</p>
Doubting Thomas	<p>A doubting Thomas is a person who will not believe something without proof, or without seeing it for themselves.</p>
Down at heel	<p>A person who is down-at-heel is someone whose appearance is untidy or neglected because of lack of money.</p> <p>Ex: "The down-at-heel student I first met became a successful writer."</p>
Eyes like a hawk	<p>If you've got eyes like a hawk, you've got good eyesight and notice every detail.</p> <p>Ex: "Of course Dad will notice the scratch on his car - he's got eyes like a hawk! "</p>

II. Appendic 2: Keys to exercices

Exercise 1:

- | | |
|------|------|
| 1. B | 6. C |
| 2. C | 7. B |
| 3. A | 8. B |
| 4. D | 9. D |

5. C

10. B

Exercise 2:

1. d

5.a

2. b

6. c

3. e

7. f

4.g