

THE CONCEPT OF "BIRDS" IN THE PHRASEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE (BASED ON ENGLISH MATERIALS)

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Annotation

This article explores the concept of "birds" in English phraseology, analyzing how avian imagery is embedded in idioms, proverbs, and fixed expressions. Birds serve as powerful symbols in language, reflecting human emotions, behaviors, and cultural beliefs. The study categorizes bird-related phrases, examines their semantic functions, and discusses their metaphorical meanings. By reviewing linguistic and cultural sources, the article highlights the universality and diversity of bird symbolism in English.

Keywords: phraseology, idioms, birds, metaphors, English language, cultural symbolism, linguistic analysis.

Introduction

Birds have long been a source of inspiration in human language, embodying freedom, wisdom, and omens. In English, numerous idioms and proverbs feature birds, illustrating their deep-rooted cultural significance. Phraseological units with avian references often convey abstract ideas through vivid imagery. This paper investigates how birds function in English fixed expressions, their semantic roles, and their cross-cultural variations.

Analysis and Discussion

The concept of birds in English phraseology is a fascinating linguistic phenomenon that reveals how deeply avian symbolism is embedded in human thought and communication. Birds, as creatures of flight, song, and instinct, serve as powerful metaphors in idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and fixed phrases. This section explores the semantic, cultural, and cognitive dimensions of bird-related idioms, categorizing them based on their symbolic functions and examining their metaphorical richness.

Birds as Symbols in Idiomatic Expressions

Birds in English phraseology often represent abstract ideas, emotions, and human behaviors. Their symbolic roles can be broadly classified into several key themes:

Freedom and Independence

One of the most prevalent associations with birds is the idea of freedom. The phrase *"free as a bird"* encapsulates the unrestrained liberty that birds symbolize. Similarly, expressions like *"spread one's wings"* and *"fly the coop"* metaphorically describe breaking free from limitations, whether social, professional, or personal. These idioms draw on the natural ability of birds to soar, reinforcing the human desire for autonomy.

Wisdom and Foresight

Certain birds, particularly owls and eagles, are emblematic of wisdom and keen perception. The phrase *"eagle-eyed"* denotes sharp observational skills, while *"wise as an owl"* suggests deep intelligence. These associations stem from cultural and mythological depictions—owls as Athena's sacred bird in Greek mythology and eagles as symbols of vision in Native American traditions.

Foolishness and Naivety

Conversely, some bird idioms convey foolishness or gullibility. *"Bird-brained"* implies a lack of intelligence, and *"like a headless chicken"* describes chaotic, panicked behavior. The phrase *"a little bird told me"* playfully suggests secretive or unverified information, adding a whimsical tone to gossip.

Opportunism and Resourcefulness

Birds also symbolize pragmatism and survival instincts. The well-known proverb *"the early bird catches the worm"* emphasizes the value of initiative and prompt action. Similarly, *"a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush"* warns against risking certain gains for uncertain rewards, reflecting a cautious, strategic mindset.

Omens and Superstitions

Historically, birds have been seen as messengers or omens. The idiom *"birds of a feather flock together"* suggests that people with similar traits associate with one another, while *"a little birdie told me"* implies mysterious or indirect knowledge. Superstitions like *"it's a sign if a bird flies into your house"* persist in folklore, showing how deeply birds are tied to human beliefs about fate and destiny.

Semantic and Pragmatic Functions of Bird Idioms

Bird-related idioms serve various linguistic functions, from conveying advice to expressing emotions. Their usage depends on context, tone, and cultural background.

Metaphorical Extensions

Many bird idioms extend beyond literal meanings to express abstract concepts. For example:

- *"Kill two birds with one stone"* (efficiency)

- *"Like water off a duck's back"* (resilience to criticism)
- *"Nightingale voice"* (beautiful singing)

These metaphors rely on shared cultural knowledge about bird behaviors, making them instantly recognizable to native speakers.

Emotional and Evaluative Connotations

Some idioms carry strong emotional undertones:

- Positive: *"Soar like an eagle"* (ambition), *"Sing like a canary"* (joyful expression)
- Negative: *"Dead as a dodo"* (irrelevance), *"Stool pigeon"* (betrayal)

The choice of bird influences the idiom's tone—majestic birds (eagles, swans) evoke admiration, while scavengers (vultures, crows) often have negative implications.

Proverbial Wisdom

Proverbs featuring birds often impart life lessons:

- *"Don't count your chickens before they hatch"* (caution against premature assumptions)
- *"Birds of prey don't sing"* (those with power do not boast)

These sayings reflect societal values, teaching prudence, patience, and humility.

Cross-Cultural Variations in Bird Symbolism

While some bird idioms are nearly universal, others are culture-specific, shaped by local fauna and folklore.

Shared Idioms Across Languages

- *"Kill two birds with one stone"* exists in many languages (e.g., French: *"Faire d'une pierre deux coups"*).
- *"A little bird told me"* has equivalents in German (*"Ein Vogel hat es mir gesagt"*) and Russian (*"Мне птичка на ушко сказала"*).

Culture-Specific Bird Idioms

- In Chinese, *"A flying phoenix"* symbolizes success, whereas in English, phoenixes represent rebirth.
- The Japanese idiom *"Even a crow can mimic a cuckoo"* implies forced imitation, a concept absent in English.

These differences highlight how regional fauna and mythology shape linguistic expressions.

Cognitive and Psychological Perspectives

From a cognitive linguistics standpoint, bird idioms exemplify conceptual metaphors—where concrete experiences (birds flying) represent abstract ideas (freedom). The ubiquity of avian metaphors suggests a deep psychological connection between humans and birds, possibly rooted in their visibility, mobility, and vocalizations.

Evolution of Bird Idioms Over Time

Some bird-related phrases have archaic origins but remain in use:

- "Rare as hen's teeth" (extremely rare, since hens lack teeth)
- "Mad as a wet hen" (furious, from the erratic behavior of soaked poultry)

Others have evolved or faded, reflecting changing cultural attitudes toward birds.

Conclusion

The phraseological landscape of English is rich with avian imagery, reflecting both universal and culture-specific symbolism. Birds serve as versatile metaphors, enriching communication with vivid expressions. Further research could explore regional variations and historical influences on bird-related idioms.

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