

GENDER PECULIARITIES OF ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

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Abstract: This study investigates gender peculiarities in English phraseological units (PUs) to reveal how language encodes cultural attitudes, stereotypes, and social hierarchies related to masculinity and femininity. Phraseological units—idioms, fixed expressions, and proverbs—serve as linguistic markers of historically shaped gender concepts. Using cognitive, sociolinguistic, and semantic analysis, the study categorizes gender-marked idioms, examines their conceptual metaphors, and evaluates the extent of gender asymmetry. The findings indicate that male-related idioms predominantly highlight strength, rationality, and authority, whereas female-related idioms emphasize emotionality, beauty, domestic roles, or social dependence. Additionally, the article identifies modern trends toward gender neutrality and inclusive expression in contemporary English. The research concludes that while traditional idioms preserve historical gender biases, current linguistic changes reflect evolving cultural attitudes toward gender equality.

Keywords: phraseological units, idioms, expression, linguistics, proverbs, gender peculiarities.

Language expresses not only ideas but also social identity, cultural norms, and gender ideologies. Among linguistic units, phraseological expressions play a significant role in preserving the worldview of a speech community. Gender-marked idioms in English represent deeply rooted cultural meanings about masculinity and femininity shaped by religion, literature, folklore, and historical gender roles.

The representation of gender in idioms reveals asymmetrical structures: masculine idioms tend to project power and rationality, whereas feminine idioms highlight emotion, beauty, or morality. Understanding these phraseological patterns is crucial for analyzing how gender stereotypes are reproduced and transformed through language [3, 94].

The purpose of this research is to analyze gender peculiarities in English phraseological units, classify the most common idioms, and explore their sociolinguistic and cognitive implications. The study also examines modern tendencies toward gender-neutral and inclusive language.

Gender peculiarities in phraseology refer to the way idioms express ideas, emotions, and evaluations related to men and women. These expressions often reveal traditional views of masculinity and femininity. In English, many idioms originate from literature, religion, folklore,

and social practices that have historically shaped gender roles. Gender-marked idioms can be classified semantically into several groups:

1. Idioms describing male qualities and social roles: A man of his word— a trustworthy person. A self-made man – a man who achieved success through his own efforts. Man of the world – a worldly-wise, experienced person. These expressions typically associate men with power, responsibility, and rationality.

2. Idioms describing female qualities and behavior: Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned – a rejected woman’s anger is intense. Every mother’s son – all men, emphasizing maternal importance. To be no better than one should be – a euphemism referring to female immorality. These idioms often emphasize emotional, moral, or domestic characteristics of women.

3. Idioms reflecting gender stereotypes or inequality: A woman’s work is never done – emphasizes endless domestic duties. Boys will be boys – justifies male misbehavior as natural. Man up! – encourages toughness, reinforcing masculine ideals. Such idioms demonstrate how deeply gender ideologies are embedded in language [2, 87].

3. Sociolinguistic and Cognitive Aspects. From a sociolinguistic point of view, phraseological gender asymmetry reflects the historical dominance of men in public life and the marginalization of women. This is why idioms about men are often evaluative and prestigious, while idioms about women can be stereotypical or pejorative. Cognitively, idioms form part of the conceptual framework through which people perceive the world. They encode collective gender concepts—for instance, “man = power / rationality” and “woman = emotion / beauty.” However, in recent decades, linguistic consciousness has been shifting toward gender neutrality. Idioms such as chairman, fireman, or policeman are increasingly replaced with chairperson, firefighter, and police officer to promote equality and inclusiveness.

4. Modern Tendencies. Contemporary English shows a tendency to reconsider traditional gendered expressions. Feminist linguistics and sociocultural movements have encouraged the re-evaluation of idioms that perpetuate inequality. Some new idiomatic expressions, such as girl power or boss lady, represent this change—emphasizing women’s independence and leadership rather than passivity or dependence [2,98]. Thus, gender peculiarities in English phraseology are dynamic, evolving alongside social change. The language today increasingly reflects a more balanced view of gender roles, though traditional idioms still serve as valuable evidence of historical attitudes toward gender.

Idioms Related to Men. English idioms related to men usually highlight strength, authority, rationality, and leadership.

They show how men were traditionally viewed as the dominant gender in society.

Idiom	Meaning
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A man of his word	A reliable person who keeps promises
A man of action	Someone who acts decisively
Self-made man	A man who achieved success on his own
Man in the street	An ordinary man
A man of few word	A quiet, reserved person
Man for all seasons	A versatile, capable man
Every man for himself	Each person looks after their own interests
Man about town	A socially active
Old man	Informally means “husband” or “father

Idioms Related to Women

Idioms about women often focus on beauty, emotions, care, and relationships. However, some idioms also reflect stereotypical or patronizing attitudes toward women.

Idiom	Meaning
Old wives’ tale	A superstition or traditional belief
A mother’s love	Pure, unconditional love
Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned	A woman’s anger when rejected is powerful
Behind every great man there’s a great woman	A woman’s support is key to a man’s success
Woman of substance	A strong, intelligent, and respected woman
Beauty is only skin deep	Outer beauty is not real worth
Sugar and spice and everything nice	Used about girls to show sweetness
To be a mother hen	Overprotective or caring woman
Like a fishwife	A loud, quarrelsome woman

The study reveals a clear gender asymmetry within English phraseological units. This asymmetry stems from historical gender roles that privileged men as leaders and rational thinkers while confining women to domestic, emotional, or decorative roles. Idioms act as linguistic fossils: they preserve cultural attitudes from centuries ago. From a sociolinguistic perspective, idioms reinforce gendered expectations in subtle ways [4, 125]. Expressions like “man up” normalize toxic masculinity, while idioms like “old wives’ tales” delegitimize female knowledge. These idioms influence communication, perceptions, and social behavior. From a cognitive perspective, idioms reflect conceptual metaphors that structure thought. By repeatedly linking woman with

emotion and man with power, language strengthens existing cognitive schemas. Modern linguistic trends reveal a growing tendency to re-evaluate sexist expressions. This reflects broader sociopolitical movements toward gender equality and challenges the ideologies embedded in traditional phraseology.

Conclusion. English phraseological units demonstrate how deeply gender ideologies are embedded in language. Male-related idioms typically carry positive and prestigious meanings, whereas female-related idioms often reinforce emotional, domestic, or stereotypical traits. Cognitive metaphors, cultural history, and social hierarchies play key roles in shaping phraseological gender patterns. Although traditional idioms preserve historical stereotypes, contemporary English shows increasing efforts to reduce gender bias through gender-neutral vocabulary and empowering expressions. Understanding these linguistic mechanisms is essential for promoting equality and recognizing how language shapes social perception.

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